A Future for All

A Report by the Alternative Commission on the Future of UC

July 2010

A survey designed and distributed by a group of UCLA students, faculty, and employees asked UC community members to grade the recommendations that have been made by the Commission for the Future of the University, and the results show a strong rejection of the Commission's plans and process. With over 1000 responses, it is clear that UC students, workers, and alumni do not support moving classes online or eliminating majors and departments that are offered at multiple campuses. There is also a strong desire to resist constant fee increases and, most people do not want to replace in-state students with higher paying out-of-state students.

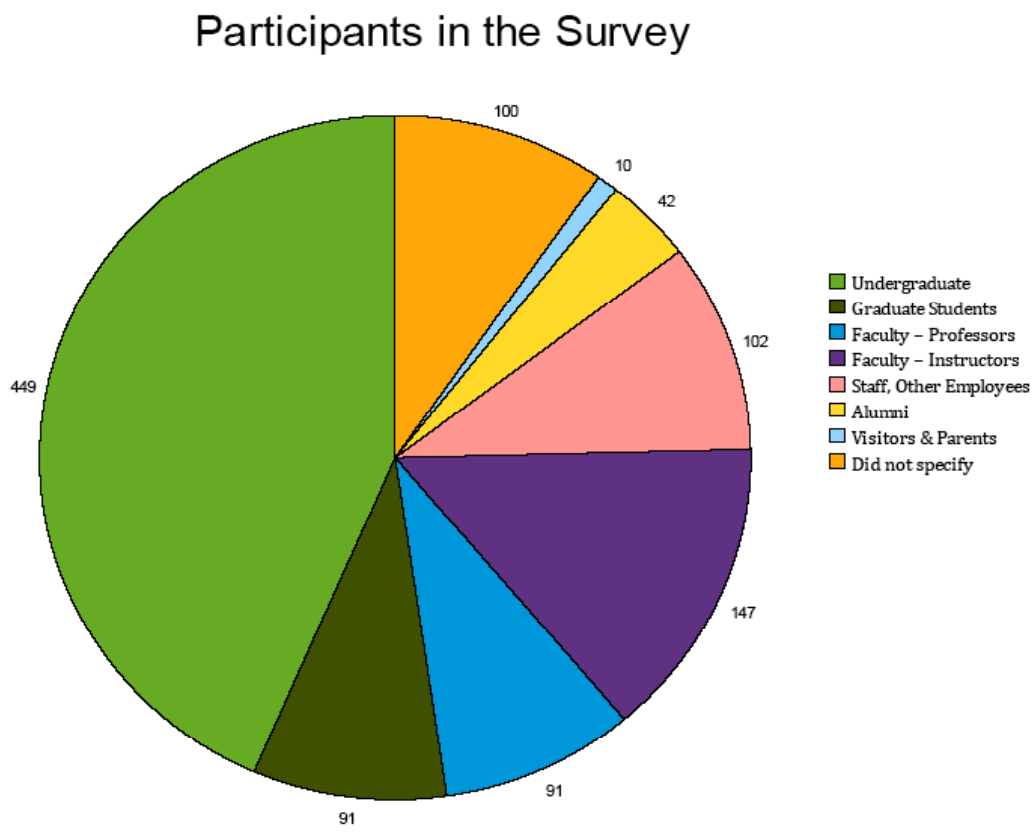
Perhaps one of the most troubling findings of the survey is that most students have not heard about the Commission. 76% of respondents on the paper surveys distributed at UCLA had not heard of the Commission on the Future of UC. Many of the ones who do know something about the process feel that they have not been consulted in an effective manner. Not only do the students think they have not been a part of the conversation, but faculty and employees also feel excluded and pushed aside. In the words of one faculty member, "UCOP has preempted any faculty opinion in the academic senates and general assembly from being heard or considered. Everyone is up in arms about virtually every one of the commission's recommendations, as well as the poor regent's decisions and lack of transparency, but there are no outlets to be heard."

Many comments left on the surveys argue that the restructuring of the university is being shaped by current fiscal concerns. For example, one respondent wrote: "All of these proposals are designed to save money; they have nothing to do with the quality of education or with implementing the master plan: to educate all of the children of California who are eligible for enrollment in one of the UC's." This abandonment of the master plan was voiced in several responses.

Another prominent concern among respondents was the question of the current management of UC's finances, and the priorities of the administration. For instance, one online respondent wrote: "The UC's are managed terribly. They are currently being run by a business, not an education system. The fact that not 100% of my fees paid to attend my campus come back to my campus is wrong. My major is being cut and not all of my fees even make it back to my campus to support my major. Chancellors and other administrators do not listen to students or the Academic Senate on my campus on where the cuts should be going. They do not take students' needs into account when they cut library hours, campus buses, dining hall hours, custodial hours (who clean almost everywhere that students go on campus), TA-ships, lecturers, classes, or majors." " For many people, the Commission only adds to their sense that decisions are being made from above with little input from the main stakeholders.

Some current and past students feel that the changes being proposed will transform the quality of undergraduate education: "Getting to "shop around" academically, spending 4-5 years for my undergrad degree, and having face-to-face contact with my fellow students and teachers was what shaped my intellect in college. For most people, college is the last time they get to be exposed to so much information in such a concentrated, interconnected way. The proposals above strike me as a conveyer-belt style of education, and it seems dismissive of the intellectual and social growth spurts that happen during a young person's college years." This former student was writing in response to the idea of having three-year degrees and moving students quickly through the system.

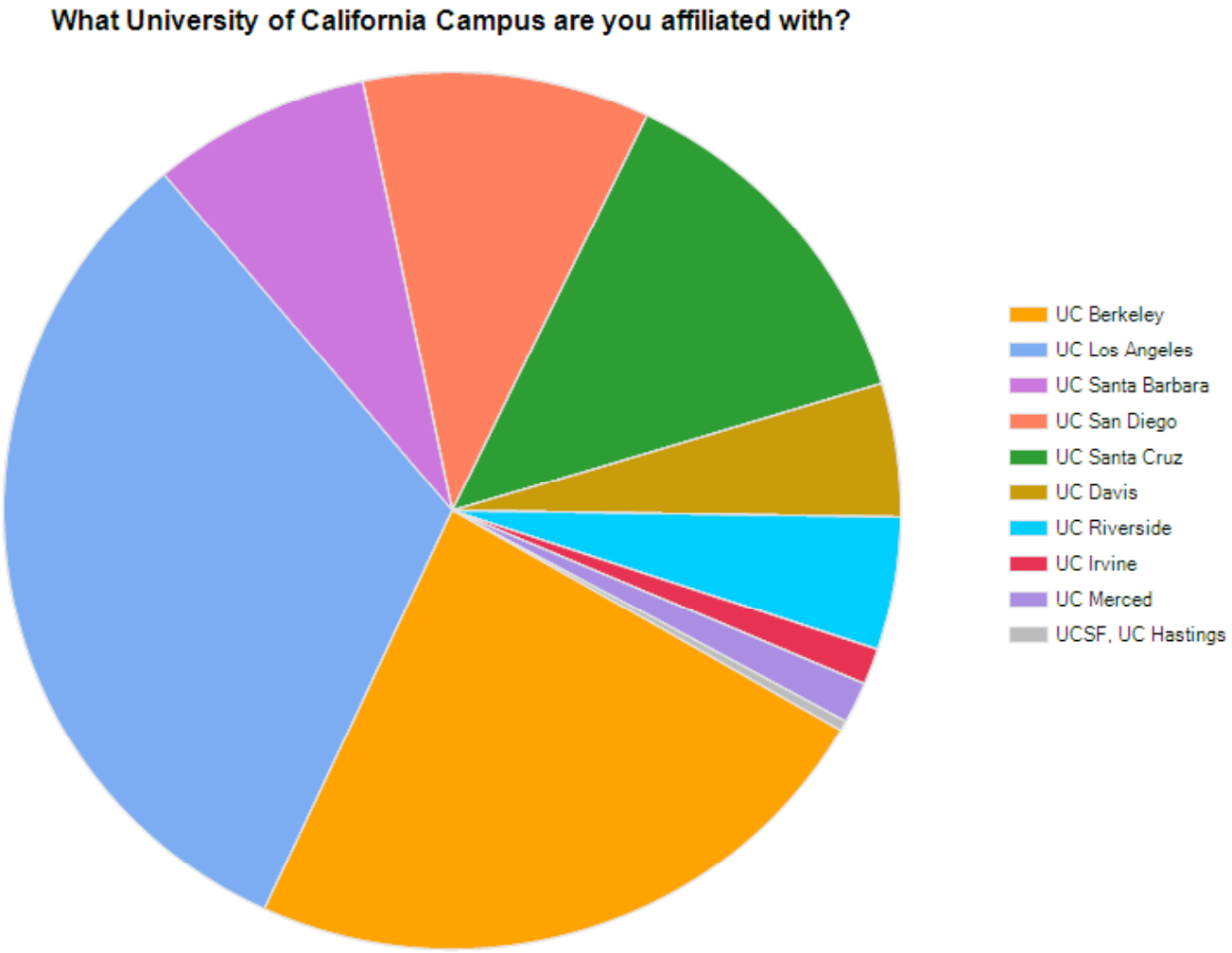
Overall, the responses came from a wide variety of UC community members. While half of the surveys were given to undergraduate students at UCLA, the other half were filled out online by a mix of faculty, staff, alumni, and undergrad and grad students: undergraduates: 12.7%; graduate students: 14.3%; professors: 17.2%; instructors: 27.6%; staff: 18.5%; alumni: 7.7%; and parent of student and visitors: 1.9%.



By types of Participants:		% total
Undergraduate	449	43.51
Graduate Students	91	8.82
Faculty – Professors	91	8.82
Faculty – Instructors	147	14.24
Staff, Other Employees	102	9.88
Alumni	42	4.07
Visitors & Parents	10	0.97
Did not specify	100	9.69
Total Participants:	1032	100.00%

Total Survey Participants:	1032
Total who filled paper form	501
Total who filled online form	531

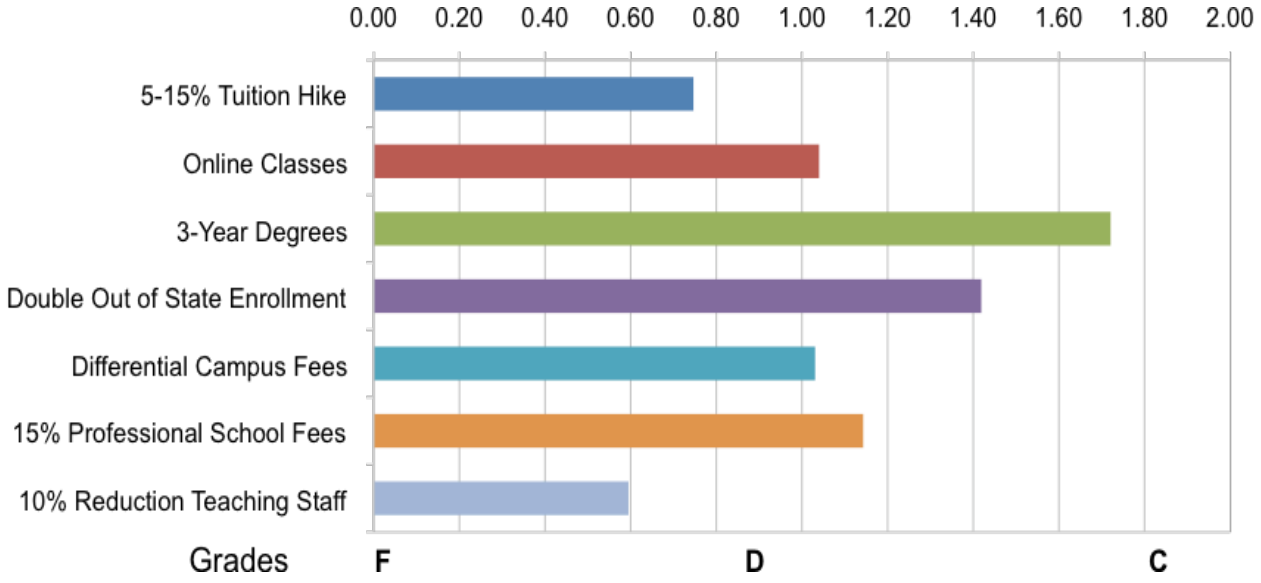
The breakdown of online responses by campus was the following: UCLA: 31.9%, Berkeley: 23.6%, Santa Cruz: 13.2%, San Diego: 10.6%, Santa Barbara: 8.1%, Riverside: 5%, Davis: 4.8%, Irvine: 1.2%, Merced: 1.2%, UCSF: 0.2% Hastings: 0.2%

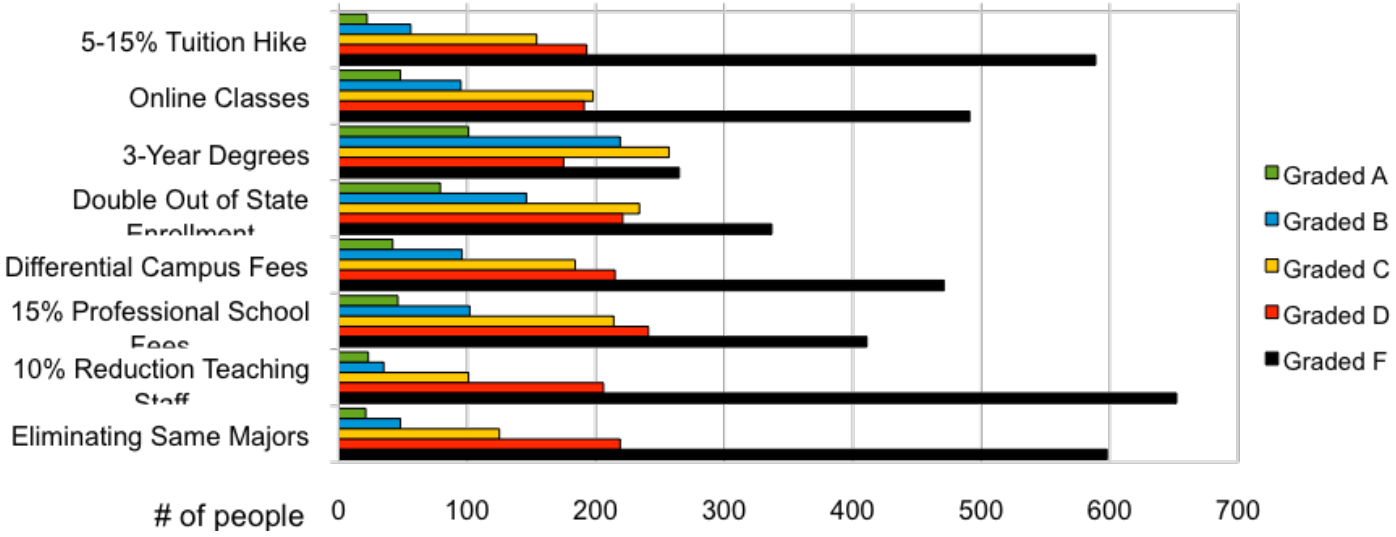


Commission on the Future Proposals: Combined Results for Everyone

When we asked people to grade specific proposals by the Commission on the Future, most recommendations received a D or F, and the only ones that got some support were raising fees for professional schools and developing a three-year degree. It is important to note that even the people who supported a quicker degree felt that it was unlikely to work since students already have a hard time graduating in four years due to the lack of availability of required classes. Many respondents expressed concern about the quality of education attainable in a three-year program as expressed here, "The emphasis that this places on rigorous, intensive classes that pack information into a limited amount of time (particularly in summer sessions, where classes are often only 6 weeks long) is not conducive to student learning at all. It reduces the learning process -- what should be the careful examination of course materials over an extended period of time that actually gives students the time and the space to learn, revisit, question, discuss, revise their ideas, put texts in dialogue with each other, etc. -- into a test of efficiency and speed."

The numbers on the top chart reflect the GPA earned by each of the Commission's proposals. Only grades F-C are present on the top chart because no proposal earned an average grade higher than C-. The second chart shows the distribution of grades earned by each proposal by the number of people who gave a certain grade.





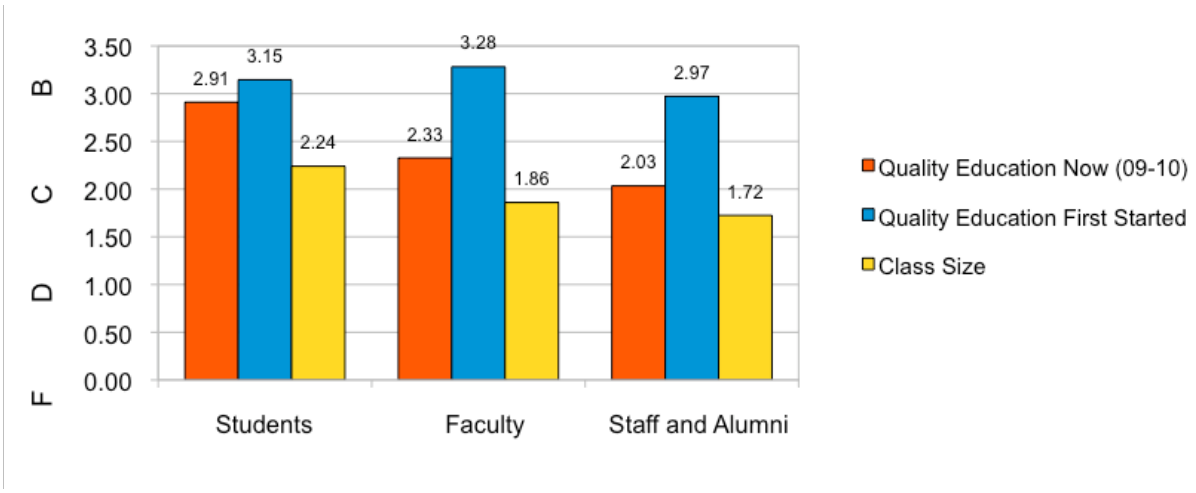
The vast majority of respondents do not favor moving classes to summer or online, and they feel the university has to find a way to control the constant increase in fees and tuition. There is also a strong rejection of charging different fees at different campuses, and students and faculty do not accept eliminating majors because they duplicate what other campuses are doing.

Quality, Transparency, and Priorities

Another set of questions asked people to judge the current quality of education in the UC system, and many wrote that they felt it has gone down in the last few years, and this decrease in satisfaction comes from an increase in class size and a sense that there are more administrators and fewer faculty. One student put it this way, "Admin are not addressing our needs - they are eliminating what we need most - a quality education."

Comparison of Education Quality

	Total # Responses	GPA:	Students	Faculty	Staff and Alumni
Group Total	953				
Quality Education Now (09-10)	888		2.91	2.33	2.03
Quality Education First Started	856		3.15	3.28	2.97
Class Size	910		2.24	1.86	1.72



The drop in Education Quality as seen by Students is about 0.25 : from B+ to B

Based on answers average time between "First Started" grades and "Now" for students is 2 years

The drop in Education Quality as seen by Faculty is about 0.95 - from B+ to C+

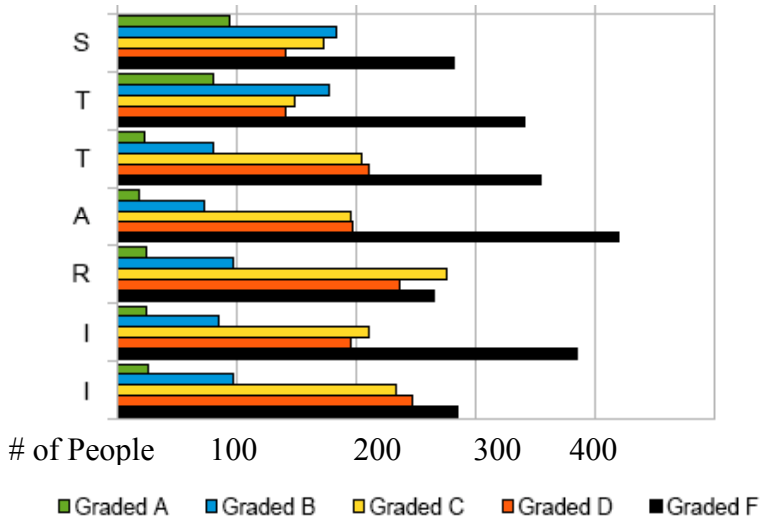
There is not enough data to calculate #of years for Faculty but estimate it to be 5-10 years

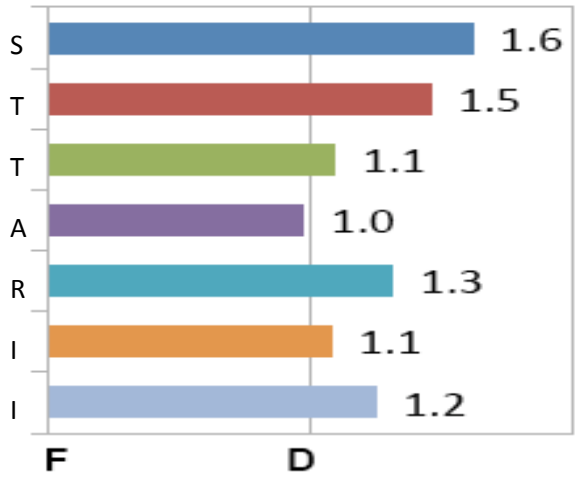
A large percentage of people also feel that the UC budget is not transparent and that the UC administration does not do a good job communicating with students, staff, and faculty. While people think their local administration is more responsive than the UC Regents, most respondents give all administrators a failing grade.

"The University's efforts to provide transparency for the budget and financial decisions is still not acceptable. There needs to be 100% transparency where the law provides and not after months or years of asking the Regents, UCOP and campus administrations for facts and figures they claim to be to difficult to compile or gather."

UC Transparency and Accountability-Combined Results for Everyone

	# Responses	GPA	Graded A	Graded B	Graded C	Graded D	Graded F
Group Total	942			Avg. GPA per Issue			
Size of Administration	876	1.62	94	184	173	142	283
Transparency of UC Budget	891	1.46	81	178	149	142	341
Transparency, Campus Finances	875	1.09	23	81	205	211	355
Accountability of UC Regents	906	0.97	18	73	196	198	421
Responsiveness Campus Admin	901	1.31	25	98	276	237	265
Involvement, UC Regents	903	1.08	24	86	211	196	386
Involvement, Campus	891	1.25	26	97	234	248	286

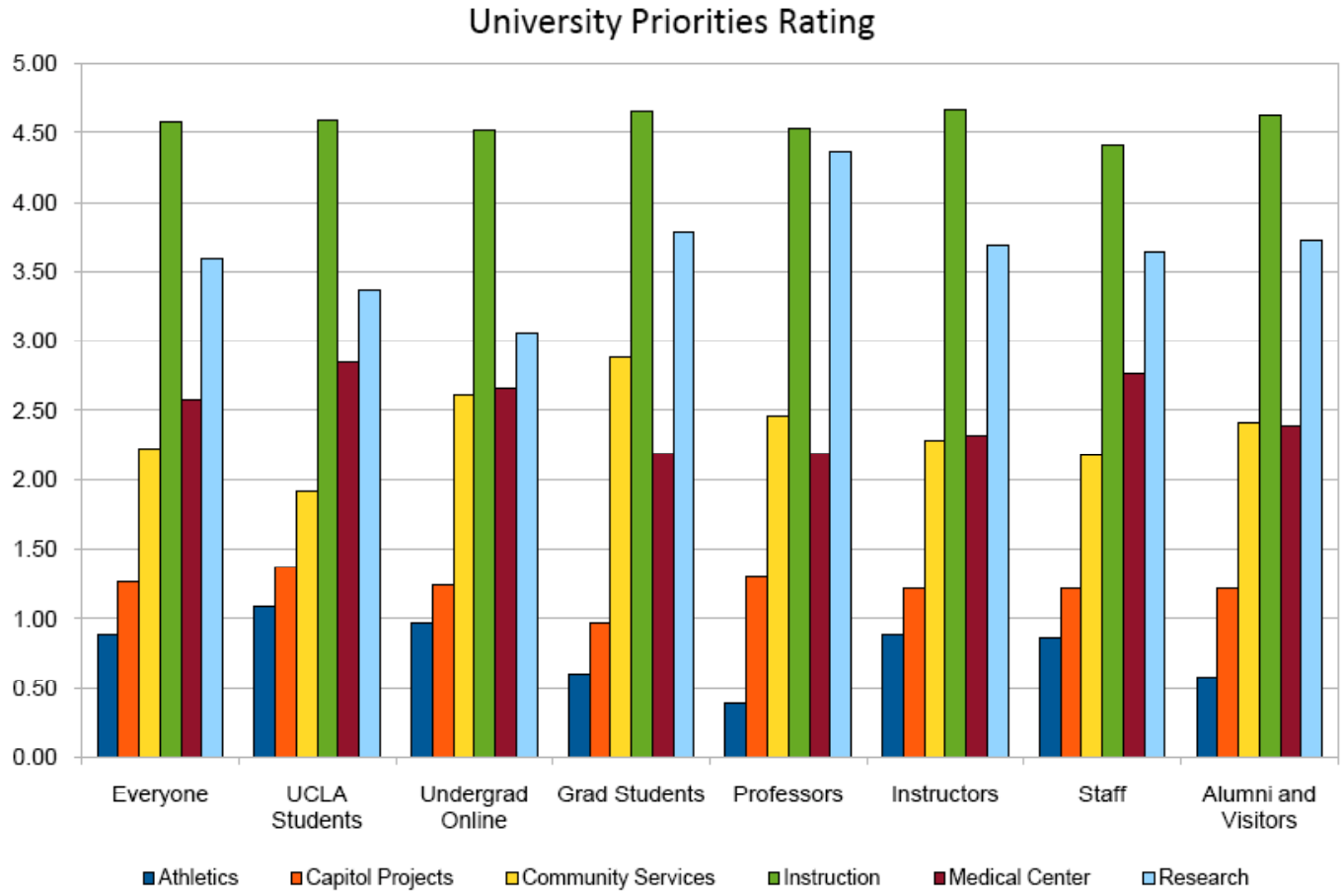




When asked what they think the priorities of the system should be, 79% said instruction and 53% said research. Lower down in the rankings were community service, medical centers, and capital projects. The lowest priority was athletics.

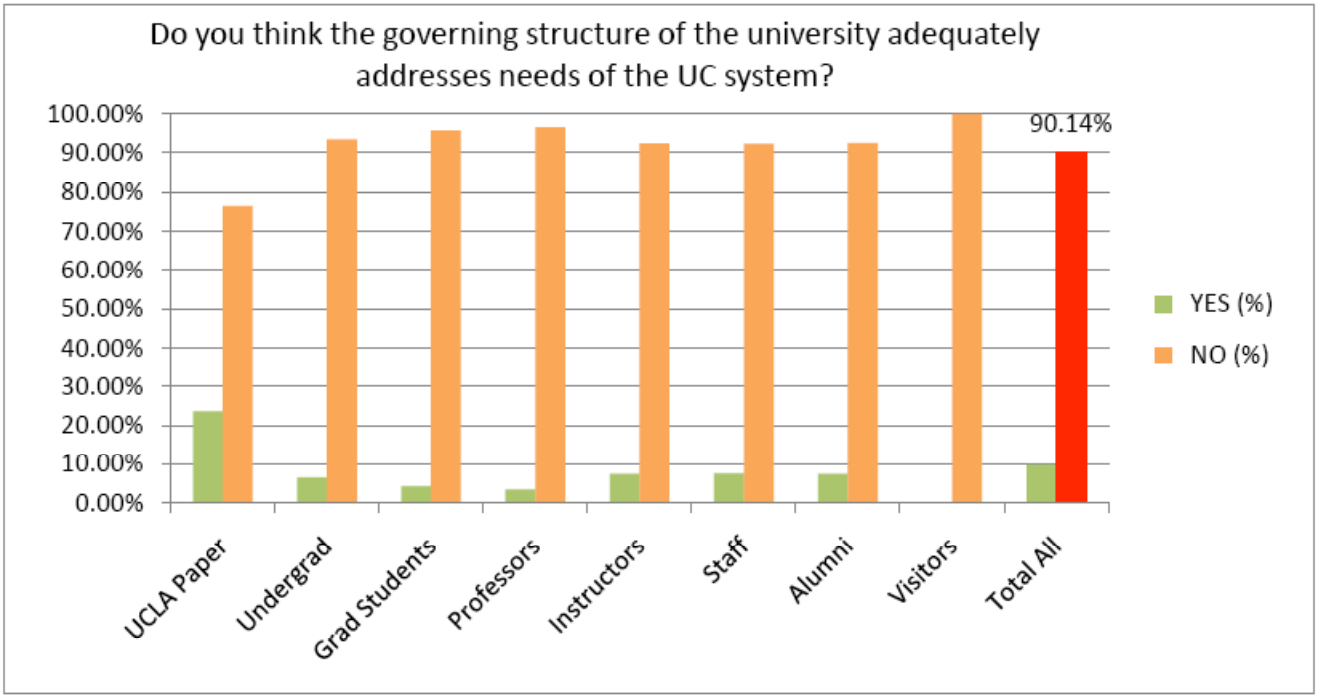
University Priorities-Comparison of Results for All Groups

	Everyone	UCLA Stud	Under	Grad St	Profes	Instru	Staff	Alumni
Group Total	888	356	67	75	91	147	101	51
Athletics	0.88	1.08	0.97	0.60	0.39	0.89	0.86	0.58
Capitol Projects	1.27	1.36	1.23	0.97	1.29	1.21	1.22	1.22
Community Services	2.22	1.92	2.61	2.88	2.45	2.28	2.18	2.40
Instruction	4.58	4.58	4.52	4.66	4.53	4.67	4.41	4.63
Medical Center	2.58	2.84	2.66	2.19	2.19	2.31	2.77	2.39
Research	3.59	3.37	3.06	3.79	4.36	3.69	3.64	3.73



Another question asked people if they thought that the governing structure of the university adequately addresses the needs of the UC system, and 94% said no. This final response should serve as a wake up call to UC administrators who clearly have to do a better job at getting all of the stakeholders involved in the future of the university. "UC Regents and Administration seem to be very out of touch with the needs, interests, and circumstances of both faculty and students, and out of touch with the purpose of a university system and the UC system as a whole. Most upper-level administrators, starting with the UC President, seem to have very little interest in education itself."

	YES	NO	YES (%)	NO (%)
UCLA Paper	32	104	23.53%	76.47%
Online:				
Undergrad	4	57	6.56%	93.44%
Grad Students	3	67	4.29%	95.71%
Professors	3	84	3.45%	96.55%
Instructors	10	123	7.52%	92.48%
Staff	7	85	7.61%	92.39%
Alumni	3	37	7.50%	92.50%
Visitors	0	10	0.00%	100.00%
Total All	62	567	9.86%	90.14%



Alternative Commission Proposals for the Future of UC

The proposals currently being offered by the UC Commission on the Future would limit access by reducing enrollments, shift costs to undergraduates through increased fees, and further erode quality by reducing teaching staff and rushing degrees via online courses and increased reliance on summer sessions.

In response to the UC Commission's proposals, the Alternative Commission presents the following eleven proposals for the future of UC. We believe these proposals will provide increased revenue through increased enrollments, save money through reductions in administration and other efficiencies, and improve the quality of the UC education in various ways.

1) Provide more opportunity, not less opportunity for Californian students

Since the university has increased its reliance on relatively inexpensive non-tenured faculty, while the sizes of classes has been expanded, the cost of educating undergraduate students in the UC system has gone down dramatically in the past twenty years. Moreover, the faculty-to-student ratio has gone up, and the campuses turn a profit on each student they enroll. We can therefore improve access and affordability by enrolling more students and lowering or freezing student fees.

2) Pursue cost savings by reducing the number of administrators

The Commission is already considering this need to reduce administrative costs, but this may be a slow and difficult process. A simpler strategy would be just to require each administrative unit to reduce its budget by 5-10% each year. After all, many academic programs regularly get this type of budgetary mandate, and so a generalized cut could motivate effective administrative cost savings.

3) Stop exploiting graduate students

Not only do graduate students cost four times more than undergrads to educate, but a recent study of UC doctoral students showed that only half of the students who start PhD programs actually get degrees within a ten year period . Moreover, only half of the students who do earn their doctorates and pursue academic jobs get tenure-track positions, and out of this group, less than third get positions at research universities. This means that most grad students are being trained for jobs that do not exist, and these grad students are really being used as cheap academic labor. Furthermore, one reason why so many grad students cannot get jobs when they graduate is that there are so many grad students teaching undergraduate courses before they get their doctoral degrees. If we fully fund grad students through grants, we can restrict the number of PhD students and limit how much they are forced teach. This strategy would help the academic labor market and allow doctoral students to graduate in a more timely fashion.

4) Increase the number of small, interactive classes

If you want to know what universities consider to be effective teaching, just look at what they say about their Honors Programs. They all stress how students are taught in small, interactive classes by expert faculty members. The UC could improve the quality of undergraduate instruction by having more seminars, but for some reason, the administration believes that it is much cheaper to have large lecture classes; however, I have shown that large lecture classes are often more expensive than small seminars due to the cost of having several small sections taught by graduate students accompanying the large lecture.

5) Allow Research Professors Not to Teach
Already many research professors use external grants to buy themselves out of their teaching duties each year, yet the university clings to the idea that everyone should teach and do research. Instead of forcing ineffective or unmotivated professors into the classroom, professors should have the option of being evaluated and promoted solely based on their research.

6) Provide Job Security for Instructors
The recent move to layoff hundreds of non-tenured lecturers shows that the university needs to provide permanent funding for instructors who have a proven record of excellent teaching. By creating a class of instructional professors, the university's commitment to undergraduate education can be fortified. In fact, the university could simply agree to transform continue appointment lecturers into Lecturers with Security of Employment.

7) Resist the move to Summer Instruction
Most of the UC campuses use the quarter system, which means that classes only meet for ten weeks, while in most universities using the semester system, classes last at least fifteen weeks. In other words, in the quarter system, students have a third less time to study any particular subject, and faculty are pushed to rush through important subject matter. If more classes are moved to the summer, and these courses only meet for six weeks, it will become even more difficult to teach students in an effective and comprehensive manner. Instead of forcing students to pay extra to take required courses in the summer, the campuses should hold more classes at night and other under-utilized times.

8) Stop the Push for Online Instruction
While it is important to use new technologies in the classroom, most online programs result in higher costs and lower retention rates. If the university wants to be respected for its quality of instruction, it cannot make students take classes online just to save money. The faculty and students should resist this move and demand more effective instruction not less.

9) Make Sure Research Pays for itself
The Commission recognizes that many external research grants lose money and that the university should bargain for higher indirect cost rates. This recognition is an important step in making sure that research funded by external grants do not lose money. Another step would be to undertake a comprehensive study of how much research at the university actually costs and who subsidizes costly research programs.

10) Stop Using External Money Managers to handle UC's Investments
Until 2000, the UC handled its own investments out of the treasurer's office, and this not only saved money, but it helped to produce much stronger investment returns. Outside money managers charge huge fees, and they often bet against each other, while they undermine the ability of the university to maintain a diverse portfolio. Instead of threatening to constantly increase employee and employer pension contributions, the system should first look at its own internal investment practices. There also needs to be a strong effort to place faculty and workers on the pension board to make sure that the regents do not push the university to invest in the private interests of the individual regents.

11) Push the State to Support the University at a Higher Level

While the commission realizes the need to get more funding from the state, they fail to support any specific policies to make this happen. It is clear that some type of revenue has to be raised, and it is necessary to repeal the requirement that all taxes and budgets have to be passed by two-thirds of the state legislature. The university should also support taxing oil extraction to use the funds for higher education.