

UC Davis

UC Davis Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Title

Experiential Learning and University of California Center Sacramento

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0h8530r3>

ISBN

9798189237287

Author

Simmons, Cynthia

Publication Date

2026-04-25

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

Experiential Learning and University of California Center Sacramento

By

CINDY KOGA SIMMONS

DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

in

Educational Leadership

in the

OFFICE OF GRADUATE STUDIES

of the

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

DAVIS

Approved:

Cassandra M. D. Hart (Chair)

Michal Kurlaender

Gloria M. Rodriguez

Committee in Charge

2026

Table of Contents

Abstract	iv
Dedication	v
Acknowledgements	vi
List of Tables	vii
List of Figures	vii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 2: THEORY, LITERATURE, AND BACKGROUND	4
Career Development Theory	4
Prior Literature	8
Experiential Learning	8
Experiential Learning and Student Outcomes	10
Experiential Learning and Equity	13
Barriers to Participation in Internships	16
UC Center Sacramento	18
Application Process	20
Internship	21
Academic Courses	22
Knowledge Sharing	23
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY	25
Application Data Collection and Analysis Process: Research Question 1	26
Application Data Collection and Analysis Process: Research Questions 2 and 3	27
Survey Data Collection	27
Measures and Methods	29
Analysis for Research Question 2: UC Center Sacramento Alumni Rate Their Experiences in the UC Center Sacramento Program	29
Analysis for Research Question 3: Program Information and Barriers to Participation	32
Background Data	32
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS	34
Research Question 1: Who Participates in UC Center Sacramento?	34

UC Center Sacramento Matriculated Student Profile.....	34
Research Question 2: How Do UC Center Sacramento Alumni Rate Their Experiences in the UC Center Sacramento Program and UC Center Sacramento Internship? How Does This Vary by Student Race/Ethnicity?	37
UC Center Sacramento Survey Student Experience (Academic, Internships, and Professional Development)	41
Postgraduate Outcomes	51
Overall Program Satisfaction and Qualitative Feedback.....	53
Research Question 3: What Barriers to Participation and Enrollment do UC Center Sacramento Alumni Identify?	60
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION	65
Limitations	68
Implications for Practice and Policy	69
Implications for Future Research	72
REFERENCES	74
Appendix A: University of California Center Sacramento Historical Timeline.....	77
Appendix B: Survey Questions.....	79

Abstract

In higher education, there has been an increasing focus on workforce preparation, connecting college attendance to career outcomes. To better prepare students for the workforce, higher education institutions have increased experiential learning opportunities, such as internships and internship-based programs, for their undergraduate students. The assumption is that offering experiential learning opportunities increases workforce preparedness. This research explores University of California Center Sacramento (UC Center Sacramento) as an internship-based experiential learning program case study and includes a quantitative analysis of UC Center Sacramento admissions data as well as analysis of survey data collected from UC Center Sacramento alumni enrolled fall 2010 through winter 2024. In addition to a quantitative analysis of the data, I include analysis of an optional open-ended survey question that was part of the UC Center Sacramento alumni survey. My findings show that UC Center Sacramento serves a diverse student population; in addition to exhibiting racial diversity, just over 40% of the students served by the program used need-based aid (Pell Grants) and nearly 45% were first-generation students. UC Center Sacramento alumni also exhibited high satisfaction with the center and its programs. They rated UC Center Sacramento's academic program and internship program particularly highly, with satisfaction broadly shared across most race/ethnicity groups. Students who identified as "other" race exhibited lower satisfaction across several dimensions. Finally, barriers to participation identified were mainly financial. These results provide important guidance about student experiences in an experiential learning program, both to administrators at UC Center Sacramento and in similar programs across the University of California and elsewhere.

Dedication

To my parents, Yoshi and Kathy Koga. I am the person I am today because of all your support and all that you worked so hard for.

Acknowledgements

I am incredibly grateful to my dissertation chair and advisor, Dr. Cassandra Hart. I would not have been able to do this without you! Your guidance, responsiveness, and support were incredibly valuable throughout my time in CANDEL and throughout the dissertation writing process. I would also like to thank my dissertation committee members, Dr. Michal Kurlaender and Dr. Gloria Rodriguez, for all your help, guidance, and advice during my time in CANDEL and for your dissertation feedback. And thank you Dr. Rosa Rodriguez for everything you have done for me and for CANDEL—each CANDEL cohort is so lucky to have you!

To my Cohort 17 classmates, the time spent together in classes and in community is a time that I will always remember and treasure! The constant encouragement and support that we have for one another is special and I miss you all!

And to my family, my wonderful husband, Jerry, and my twin boys, Aaron and Ethan. You have all been and continue to be a constant source of love and support as I decided to go back to school and complete a doctoral degree while still working full-time. I could not have been able to embark on this journey and complete it without the three of you by my side.

List of Tables

Table 1. UCCS Matriculated Student Profile (Gender, Ethnicity, and Financial Aid)	35
Table 2. UCCS Matriculated Student Profile (Pell Grant Status and First-Generation College Student Status)	36
Table 3. UCCS Matriculated Students by Major (Top 5)	37
Table 4. UCCS Survey Respondent Profile (Gender, Ethnicity, Financial Aid, Pell Grant, and First-Generation College Student Status)	39
Table 5. Demographic Comparison Between Matriculated UCCS students and the UCCS Survey Respondent Profile (Gender, Ethnicity, and Financial Aid)	40
Table 6. Qualtrics Survey Respondents by University of California Home Campus	41
Table 8. UCCS Internship Experience	47
Table 9. UCCS Professional Development Programming Experience	50
Table 10. UCCS Alumni Current Status	51
Table 11. UCCS Survey Respondents by Time to Secure First Job After Graduation.....	52
Table 12. UCCS Survey Respondents by Current Employment Sector	52
Table 13. UCCS Survey Respondents by Graduate Training	53
Table 14. UCCS Survey Respondents' Satisfaction with UCCS Overall.....	54
Table 15. UCCS Survey Respondents: Student Barriers to UCCS Participation	61
Table 16. How UCCS Alumni Heard About UCCS	63

List of Figures

Figure 1. Super's Life–Career Rainbow	5
--	---

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been a greater focus in higher education on workforce preparedness and the connection between college attendance and career outcomes. According to a 2020 survey by the Association of American Colleges and Universities, nine in 10 employers believed a liberal education was worthwhile, but significantly fewer employers believed that recent college graduates had received the necessary job preparation to succeed (Flaherty, 2021). To better prepare students for the workforce, higher education institutions have increased experiential learning opportunities, such as internships, for their undergraduate students. The field of experiential learning as a high-impact practice – a teaching and learning strategy designed to enhance student engagement, retention, and academic success (Kuh, 2008)—has experienced growth and attracted attention in recent years as it provides students with hands-on learning and professional experience prior to graduation and institutions with a way to better prepare their students. The National Association of Colleges and Employers found that experiential learning, and specifically internships, integrate knowledge and theory learned in the classroom that can provide beneficial skill development and application in a professional workplace setting, adding to an undergraduate student’s resume and providing valuable professional development.

I became interested in this connection between workforce preparedness, high-impact practices such as experiential learning, and the role that higher education plays through my own professional work. I wanted to learn more about experiential learning as a high-impact practice and how participation can impact workforce preparedness, as well as including the student perspective on their experience in an experiential learning undergraduate program focused on internships and professional development. As a result, my dissertation research looks at

University of California Center Sacramento (UC Center Sacramento) as a case study. UC Center Sacramento is a University of California system-wide undergraduate internship-based experiential learning program based in Sacramento and open to all University of California undergraduate students.

This dissertation includes a quantitative analysis of University of California Center Sacramento admissions data to understand the demographics of who participates in UC Center Sacramento, as well as a survey sent to all UC Center Sacramento alumni from fall 2010 to winter 2024 to solicit information on students' experiences in the program. This dissertation adds to the existing literature on experiential learning as a high-impact practice and workforce preparedness. The following research questions guided and informed my dissertation research:

1. Who participates in UC Center Sacramento, in terms of demographics and socioeconomic characteristics?
2. How do UC Center Sacramento alumni rate their experiences in the UC Center Sacramento program and UC Center Sacramento internship? How does this vary by student race/ethnicity?
3. What barriers to participation and enrollment do UC Center Sacramento alumni identify?

To examine these questions, I used a case study research method employing both quantitative and qualitative analysis within a career development theoretical framework.

In response to the first research question, I found that matriculated UC Center Sacramento students were nearly two-thirds female. Racially, matriculants were diverse, with 33% Latinx/Chicanx, 25% Asian American and Pacific Islander, 25% White/Caucasian, and 4% African American students represented, and the vast majority (82%) of students received

financial aid. In analyzing matriculated students for whom Pell Grant status and first-generation college student status data were available (with first-generation college student status defined by having parents who did not receive a bachelor's degree or equivalent), 41% were Pell Grant recipients and 44% were first-generation college students. UC Center Sacramento is serving a diverse group of University of California undergraduate students, including those with economic need.

In response to the second research question, my analysis found that UC Center Sacramento program alumni were overall satisfied with their UC Center Sacramento experience. In particular, alumni rated the UC Center Sacramento academic experience as well as the UC Center Sacramento internship experience highly, and this high level of satisfaction held across most ethnicity groups, with the exception of former UC Center Sacramento students who selected "other" as their race. It is noteworthy that the "other" ethnicity category appears to be an outlier in terms of program experiences, and generally the mean for many survey questions is lower for this group in comparison with other ethnicity groups. Lastly, in response to my third research question, my analysis found that the perceived barriers to participation in a program like UC Center Sacramento were mainly financial.

In the chapters that follow, I will share published research related to career development theory, a review of the experiential learning literature, and background on UC Center Sacramento as a case study. Following will be a chapter on the quantitative and qualitative methods used and an analysis of the data, including the UC Center Sacramento paper application, UC Center Sacramento online application, and survey data, as well as a summary and conclusion with implications for practice, policy, and future research.

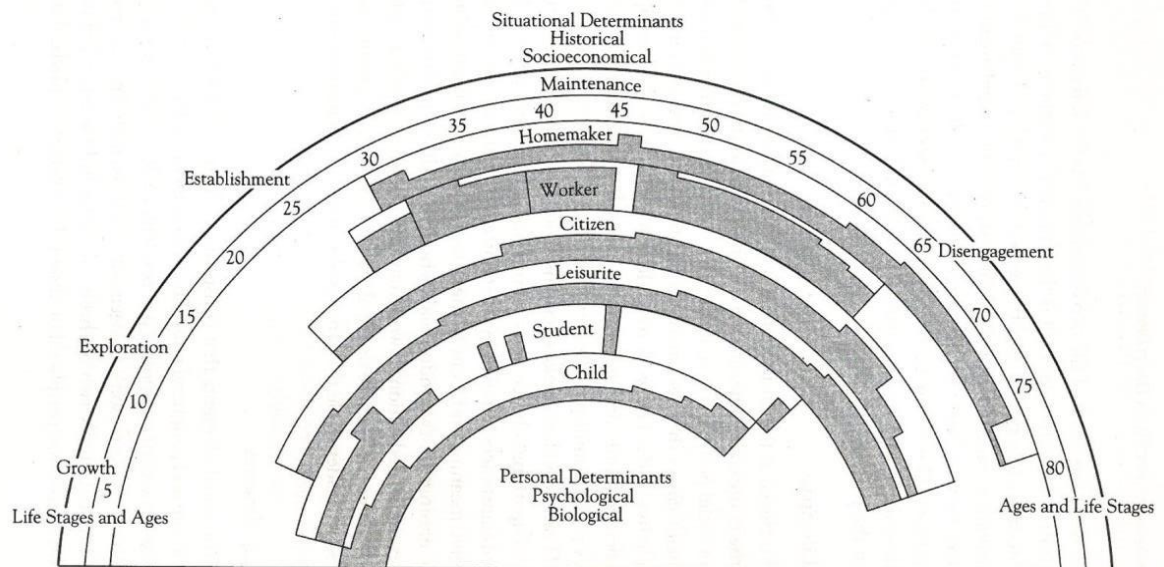
CHAPTER 2: THEORY, LITERATURE, AND BACKGROUND

To understand student experiences in an experiential learning program, using University of California Center Sacramento (UC Center Sacramento) as a case study, it is helpful to use career development theory as a theoretical framework to understand the empirical literature related to the use of internships and other experiential learning practices. Career development is an essential component of the postsecondary educational experience, and in addition to employers, students in higher education perceive career development as paramount (Herr et al., 2004). During their undergraduate studies, it is critically important for students to gain the skills necessary to be competitive and employable after graduation, in addition to learning more about various postgraduation career opportunities.

Career Development Theory

The foundation of career development theory is based on Donald Super's development theory (Super, 1957). In his early writings on career development theory, Super viewed having a career as a sequence of positions and points within individuals' stages of life. In 1976, Super introduced the Life-Career Rainbow (Figure 1) as a way of understanding the aspects of career through one's lifespan.

Figure 1. *Super's Life-Career Rainbow*



Note. Adapted from “The Life-Span, Life-Space Approach to Careers,” by D. E. Super, M. L. Savickas, and C. M. Super, in D. Brown & L. Brooks (eds.), *Career choice and development: Applying contemporary theories to practice*, 1996 (3rd ed., p. 127.) Copyright 1996 by Jossey-Bass.

Super wrote about the nine major roles and four principal theaters that describe the life space of most people (Super, 1980). He saw the nine major roles as chronological: they include (a) child; (b) student; (c) “leisurite,” which describes the position of engaging in leisure-time activities; (d) citizen; (e) worker; (f) spouse; (g) homemaker; (h) parent; and (i) pensioner, with none of these roles linked to gender. Super (1980) wrote that these roles occurred in four principal theaters, which include (a) the home; (b) the community; (c) the school (including college and university); and (d) the workplace. Super theorized that the amount and type of education an individual completes can determine the occupation entered and first occupational position. Additionally, he argued that the nonoccupational positions held by an individual influence the adult occupational positions and that “the first occupational position, both its type

and job performance, is one determinant of later occupational positions open to the individual” (Super, 1980, p. 286).

Within the context of career development, Super also wrote about decision points. He posited that decision points occur before and at the time of taking a new occupational position, before leaving a current occupational position, and before making significant decisions about a new position. He wrote that decision points are impacted on an individual level by socioeconomic status, educational attainment, occupational level, occupation, and employing organization (Super, 1980). The idea of decision points is helpful to understand the benefit of internship-based experiential learning opportunities, as participation in an internship-based experiential learning opportunity can help inform career development in individuals as they progress through their career journey.

Through his career, Super (1980) continued to develop his career development theory. In addition to the life-career rainbow and decision points, Super also wrote about psychosocial theories that included five career developmental stages in an individual’s lifetime. The five career developmental stages included the growth stage, exploration stage, establishment stage, maintenance stage, and decline stage. The exploration stage is the most relevant to my dissertation research and closely aligns with the college student experience. During this stage, individuals actively explore different career options. It is critical during this time to help students build interview skills, workplace skills, and other professional experiences that can match a student with their career choice (Long, 2012, p. 46) as students engage in experimentation, self-discovery, mentorship, and decision-making. Over the years, Super expanded on his developmental theories as they related to career decision-making and he conceptualized career choices as an ongoing process with self-awareness playing a critical role in career development.

The UC Center Sacramento program can be considered through Super's exploration stage, in which individuals actively explore career options and build skills as well as gain professional experience. The UC Center Sacramento program provides students with review and feedback of their resume, conducts practice interviews with students one-on-one, and provides professional development workshops on topics such as how to network professionally for every UC Center Sacramento student. This is in addition to the internship-based experiential learning experience itself, which can also positively benefit a student's career and career trajectory by increasing their self-awareness. Internship-based experiential learning environments, like those provided by UC Center Sacramento, provide an opportunity for informed exploration as an individual navigates who they are, what they can do, what their options are, and how they can get there.

Career development is an essential part of the postsecondary experience. Internship-based experiential learning opportunities, like the UC Center Sacramento program, allow for students to increase their self-awareness about the types of jobs that they do or do not want to do through direct on-the-job learning experiences. Participating in a program like UC Center Sacramento allows individuals to make informed decisions at critical points in their lifetime based on information and hands-on experience. It is important to note that both Super's life-career rainbow and his career development process acknowledge the impact of demographics, in particular socioeconomic differences, but do not incorporate these differences in the models. Additionally, Super does not account for all demographic differences and the value that hands-on experiences can have for these different demographic groups.

Prior Literature

In reviewing the literature, the field of experiential learning has been around for decades. Experiential learning theory is a philosophy of education called the *theory of experience* (Dewey, 1938) and it is commonly defined as an educational approach where learners gain knowledge and skills through hands-on and real work experiences. It draws on the work of 20th-century scholars including John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, Jean Piaget, William James, Carl Jung, Paulo Freire, and Carl Rogers, among others (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). David Kolb's model of experiential learning is widely considered to be foundational and provides a framework for what experiential learning is and should be.

According to Kolb, a high-quality experiential learning experience should include a concrete experience, incorporate reflection, involve thinking through the meaning of the experience, and then lead to a practice of what one has learned (Kolb, 2017). The core concepts of experiential learning theory include the learning cycle, learning style, and learning space (Kolb, 2017). In the postsecondary context, a high-quality experiential learning program should also include a connection between employment (paid or unpaid) and student learning (Halper et al., 2020). Many postsecondary internship-based experiential learning programs are based on the Kolb (2017) experiential learning theory model and often reference his work.

Experiential Learning

Growing research has indicated positive and beneficial outcomes for college students who participate in internship-based experiential learning programs as a high-impact practice and their impact on academic achievement, career, and employment, as well as an increase in self-confidence and adaptability (Wolfgram and Ahrens, 2022, p. 139). According to Kuh (2008),

high-impact activities, such as experiential learning, appear to be effective with college students for the following reasons:

1. They typically demand time and effort towards a purposeful task.
2. They place students in circumstances that connect them with faculty and peers.
3. They provide an increased likelihood that students will experience diversity through increased interactions with others.
4. Students typically receive feedback about their performance that they can then work on.
5. They provide students with opportunities to integrate and apply knowledge in a different setting outside of the traditional classroom.

Kuh (2008) also found that “while participation in effective educational activities generally benefits all students, the salutary effects are even greater for students who begin college at lower achievement levels, as well as students of color, compared with white students” (p. 19).

In 2014, the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) began working on constructs of career readiness as a part of career development (NACE, 2025). More than 80 colleges and universities, which included over 6,000 students who had worked as either an intern or student worker, as well as nearly 12,000 evaluators, made up of managers, coworkers, and mentors, participated in the pilot project. The NACE researchers found that the competencies for a career-ready workforce included the following career readiness components: career and self-development, communication, critical thinking, equity and inclusion, leadership, professionalism, teamwork, and technology.

Relatedly, in the article “The Potential Power of Internships and The Impact on Career Preparation,” published in *Research in Higher Education Journal*, Galbraith and Mondal (2020)

included the following seven criteria determined by NACE in 2018 that need to be considered in an internship:

- The experience must be an extension of the classroom: a learning experience that provides for applying the knowledge gained in the classroom. It must not be simply to advance the operations of the employer or be the work that a regular employee would routinely perform.
- The skills or knowledge learned must be transferable to other employment settings.
- The experience has a defined beginning and end, and a job description with desired qualifications.
- There are clearly defined learning objectives/goals related to the professional goals of the student's academic coursework.
- There is supervision by a professional with expertise and educational and/or professional background in the field of experience.
- There is routine feedback from the experienced supervisor.
- There are resources, equipment, and facilities provided by the host employer that support learning objectives/goals.

Galbraith and Mondal (2020) wrote that internships can serve as competitive differentiators, and therefore universities should review their policies around internship programs and expand these programs.

Experiential Learning and Student Outcomes

Current literature and research have shown that internship-based experiential learning participation has positive effects on student retention and graduation (Bradberry and De Maio,

2019) as well as postgraduation outcomes (Galbraith and Mondal, 2020) across all student groups. High-quality experiential learning programs are critical to the success of a student as well as the institution that they attend (Sass et al., 2018). In particular, Bradberry and De Maio (2019) found through their case student research of the Model United Nations and Judicial Internship program at their university that students who participated in an experiential learning opportunity had higher graduation rates and were more likely to attend graduate school or law school and/or to find employment after graduation more quickly in comparison to their peers. The Bradberry and De Maio study points to positive impacts for their Model United Nations and Judicial Internship programs, particularly around leadership, communication skills, and professionalism, associated with experiential learning participation.

Relatedly, a study by Parker et al. (2016) focused specifically on the impacts that internships had on fourth-year college grade point average. Through an analysis of the Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education longitudinal data set, the authors found significant positive impacts on grade point average (Parker et al., 2016, p. 108) when comparing students who participated in an internship and students who did not participate in an internship during their time in college. This advantage persisted despite controlling for other confounding factors including academic preparation, previous grades, demographic characteristics, institutional characteristics, and other college experiences. The results of the Parker et al. study indicate that internships can be beneficial during a student's time in school, as well as postgraduation, because a student's grade point average may have an impact on a student's job search immediately after college as well as graduate or professional school opportunities.

A review of the literature shows that participating in internship-based experiential learning opportunities also has benefits that extend beyond a student's time in college. It also is

related to a college student's postgraduation outcomes, including career development. Galbraith and Mondal's 2020 study results were based on using survey data from a public university that is a member of the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education, which enrolls a diverse student body of 8,900 students and includes academic programs offering bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees. The survey was administered through the campus' Career Education and Services office at the university. Survey respondents included both recent graduates and past graduates. The authors found that upon the conclusion of the internship, students were frequently offered a full-time position, as the internship provided students with an opportunity to apply their knowledge and gain hands-on experience. Additionally, the authors found that the internship opportunity helped to build strong networks and assisted students in their career choices.

Additionally, research conducted by NACE in 2018 by Guarise and Kostenblatt found that participation in both paid and unpaid internships contributed positively to career development. They found that participation led to both short-term and long-term employment benefits. They collected data from August 2016 to December 2016 and focused their data collection on alumni who graduated from an undergraduate liberal arts program between 2008 and 2014. With over 5,000 respondents, they found that college students who participated in one or more internships were more likely to have received an employment offer by the time of their graduation and had a higher salary at the beginning and therefore over the course of their career. Respondents felt that participating in one or more internships impacted their career success. Relatedly, Binder et al. (2015) found that internships, both paid and unpaid, were a shared route to work experience that provided developmental benefits leading to improved academic and career outcomes.

In addition to the benefits of participating in internship-based experiential learning opportunities through their college campus, in a 2022 report, “The Value of Career Services,” VanDerziel showed a positive correlation between student utilization of career services and job offers. Career services included help with searching for an internship, mock interviews, and networking preparations. Sometimes, these career services are intertwined with experiential learning opportunity programs, which is the case at UC Center Sacramento. VanDerziel reported that graduating seniors who used at least one career service received an average of 1.24 job offers, versus 1.0 job offers for students who did not use any campus services. This was based on a survey with 15,860 bachelor’s degree student respondents from four colleges and universities (VanDerziel, 2022).

In summary, the literature shows the value of experiential learning opportunities broadly and more specifically the value of internship experiences for students’ college and career outcomes. Given this, we should be considering issues around equity, access, and barriers to participation. In 2016, the Looksharp study “State of Millennial Hiring Report” found that internships were a critical element in determining career success. Respondents in the study shared that their internship experience positively impacted their college academics as well as career plans. Although internship participation was found to be positive, the study also highlighted a concern, citing that demand for internships was higher than supply. More than 70% of respondents in this study indicated that they had searched unsuccessfully for an internship in college.

Experiential Learning and Equity

According to NACE research (Lake, 2021), in 2007 only 57% of Black bachelor’s degree holders were employed. This number has improved, and 2016 data showed that the employment

rate for Black degree holders had increased to 87%; they were in positions that traditionally paid less, such as office support roles. Given this, it is important to look at whether experiential learning and internship participation has different impacts for different demographic groups. In Kuh's (2008) analysis of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) 2007 survey, participating in high-impact practices was found to have positive benefits for all students, but especially historically underserved students. Kuh (2008) found that students of color benefited from experiential learning opportunities to a greater degree than their peers. Studies have suggested that the number of student participants of color remain low and therefore students of color communities are missing out on developing career competencies and employment postgraduation (Lake, 2021).

In "A Case Study of Black Students' Perception of Experiential Learning at PWIs [predominantly White institutions]," Lake (2021) found a number of insights that Black students shared through interviews. Lake found that targeted programming of experiential learning opportunities was needed in order to reach Black students. In addition, Black students who were most interested in internships and study abroad experiential learning opportunities discussed the importance of financial assistance to cover costs. Finally, although many participants in Lake's research were focused on graduation as their first priority, not as much focus was given to postgraduation employment. The insight that Lake was able to gather through student voices emerged around the role of race and microaggressions that affected Black students' confidence and sense of belonging and identified financial barriers to participating in experiential learning programs, the need for clarifying career goals, and the importance and desire for mentors. Lake's research speaks to the need for experiential learning programs to do targeted outreach to Black

communities about these programs and their benefits as well as to the institution's role in making experiential learning programs not only widely available but also financially accessible.

Similarly, looking at Latinx students in particular, in the article “Latinx Internship Prepa: An Experiential Career Readiness and Preparation Program for Latinx, First-Generation Undergraduate College Students,” Armijo et al. (2022) found that internship preparation and design should not be a one-size-fits-all approach but rather should account for a student's background in order to optimize their experiential learning experience. Armijo et al. utilized an electronic assessment that was administered at the end of the Latinx Internship Prepa program during the summer and fall of 2020. Based on students' experience, the authors found that the students in the program wanted to participate in an experiential learning program in order to gain knowledge, and to engage in a program that was designed for first-generation college students. In particular, participants of the Latinx Internships Prepa program shared that strengths of the program were the following related experiential learning activities: creating a resume, building a professional social media profile, and participating in mock interviews with professionals (Armijo et al., 2022). Additionally, they cited the benefits of having a program specifically tailored to Latinx students.

In “Assessing Underserved Students' Engagement in High-Impact Practices,” Finley and McNair (2013) compared students' participation in high-impact practices such as internships, service learning courses, study abroad experiences, learning communities, capstone courses, and research with a faculty member to students' perception of their own learning as encompassed through the following four measures: (a) self-reported engagement in activities that NSSE researchers associated with “deep approaches to learning,” (b) self-reported gains in practical competence, (c) self-reported gains in general education, and (d) self-reported gains in personal

and social development. Through the analysis of NSSE data and their survey, the authors found that students in underrepresented racial or ethnic minority groups benefited significantly from high-impact practices and especially from multiple high-impact practices. In conducting their analysis, they controlled for differences in students' gender, race, age, class level, race or ethnicity, transfer status, and first-generation status. Although student perceptions can be imperfect, students' voices and their perceptions of their internship experience and impacts are an important element of evaluating the effectiveness of internship-based experiential learning opportunities and learning from these experiences. Through their research, Finley and McNair found that underserved students benefited greatly from participation in multiple high-impact practices.

Additionally, Kuh (2008) provided insight into the role of internship-based experiential learning as a high-impact practice that showed benefits for all students, but found that these benefits were more pronounced for Black and Hispanic students. His research showed improvement in Black student retention rates and Hispanic student GPAs. This research suggests that although participating in high-impact activities is good for all students, it can be particularly beneficial for traditionally underserved student communities.

Barriers to Participation in Internships

Given the benefits of experiential learning participation for undergraduate students' college and career outcomes, it is critically important to ensure that all undergraduate students are able to access experiential learning opportunities such as internship participation. Therefore, it is important to understand the barriers to participation and the challenges that undergraduate students can face when evaluating experiential learning programs and opportunities.

The literature on barriers to internship participation has often focused on financial, social, cultural, and institutional factors (Hora et al., 2021). First, in regard to financial obstacles, students with financial aid often cannot afford to intern or work for free or in lieu of a paid position. Often these students are already taking out loans and working multiple jobs (Perna, 2010). Second, students may face social obstacles with regards to internship participation due to a lack of social capital and access to social networks. In particular, first-generation students may have less access to social capital from their families and may not be encouraged to pursue experiences such as internships (Holland, 2010). Third, there may be cultural barriers to internship participation. For example, middle-class students often participate in internships at a higher rate than students from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Bathmaker et al., 2013). Lastly, there could be institutional obstacles to internship participation in the form of student support services. Students may struggle to even find out about internships as well as lack access to resume audits and interview coaching.

Participation in an experiential learning opportunity, such as an internship-based experiential learning program, can enhance a student's skills as well as increase opportunities for employability (Hora et al., 2021). However, finding an internship can also be difficult, particularly for students who do not have access to financial, social, and cultural capital (Hora et al., 2021). In "Closing the Doors of Opportunity: A Field Theoretic Analysis of the Prevalence and Nature of Obstacles to College Internships," Hora et al. (2021) found that the majority of survey respondents who wanted to pursue an internship but could not cited the need to work, course load, lack of internship positions, and inadequate or no pay.

The literature in the field generally recognizes the benefits of internship participation for all students and added benefits for student of color communities. This speaks to the need to have

programs designed with access and equity in mind. Experiential learning opportunities should be developed intentionally (Kolb, 2017; Kuh, 2013) and with equity in mind (McNair et al., 2020). The positive benefits of experiential learning participation on college student retention and graduation (Bradberry and De Maio, 2019), on postgraduation outcomes (Galbraith and Mondal, 2020), and on postsecondary students' career development should all be considered. As higher education institutions increase opportunities to participate in high-impact practices such as internships, it is imperative that barriers for students be addressed to ensure that opportunities for professional and career development are widely available to all students. Doing an internship during college can be a signal to potential employers that a student is ready to enter the workforce (Hora et al., 2021), and so a lack of equal opportunity for all college students is inequitable and problematic.

UC Center Sacramento

UC Center Sacramento is a University of California (UC) system-wide experiential learning program that is administered jointly by UC Office of the President and the UC Davis Office of the Chancellor and Provost's Office. The center is located in downtown Sacramento, steps away from California's state capitol. Structurally, the center has typically had two adjunct assistant professors, two visiting professors, one graduate student teaching assistant, one to two graduate student researcher(s), one part-time faculty director, and five full-time career staff members. Over the years staffing has both expanded and contracted. The center originally had a dual mission to engage undergraduate students in public service (UC Center Sacramento, n.d.) through public policy-focused internships and to help inform public policy using UC faculty research and connecting UC faculty with the Sacramento policy community. From its inception,

UC Center Sacramento's primary goals have been to prepare students to become California's future leaders as well as to share knowledge to support public policy making.

The first part of UC Center Sacramento's mission, to prepare students to become California's future leaders and engage UC undergraduate students in public service, is carried out by UC Center Sacramento's academic program. The center's academic program engages UC students in public service and policy through a set of academically rigorous courses and an internship program. The core set of academic courses also includes an independent research project.

UC Center Sacramento students enroll at UC Davis as full-time students. As full-time students, all UC Center Sacramento students retain their full financial aid eligibility. Because UC Center Sacramento is a system-wide experiential learning program that is administratively operated by UC Davis, the UC Davis course numbers are through the UC Davis Department of Political Science and the courses have been approved by the UC Davis Academic Senate. The center's coursework consists of a California politics and policy course (POL 195), a research design and methodology course (POL 196E), and a field study internship course (POL 192A) as well as a research practicum (POL 193). In the past, the center has also offered special selective topic courses in health policy, environmental policy, criminal justice, and education policy, which rotates each term as a POL 108 course. If students elect to enroll in POL 108, they take the special selective topic course (POL 108) in lieu of the California politics and policy course, POL 195. For semester-system students from UC Berkeley and UC Merced, two additional courses are required, a course in American politics (POL 196A) and an independent study course (POL 198), in order to maintain full-time student status.

The center has historically served approximately 40 students per term and operates both quarter and semester programs in the following terms: fall semester, fall quarter, winter quarter, spring semester, spring quarter, and the summer term, which both semester-system students and fall semester students can participate in; however, during the most recent academic year (2025–2026), enrollments at UC Center Sacramento grew exponentially, a possible indicator of growing demand for experiential learning and internship opportunities. Students come from across all UC campuses for one term. The UC campuses that participate in UC Center Sacramento include all of the quarter-system campuses (UC Davis, UC Irvine, UCLA, UC Riverside, UC Santa Cruz, and UC San Diego) and two semester-system campuses (UC Berkeley and UC Merced). In addition to its robust undergraduate program, the center has also supported graduate students through its Emerging Scholars Program, the GOLD Graduate Fellowship Program, and its STEM Solutions competition.

In addition to the staff listed above, UC Center Sacramento also has a staff liaison at each of the UC campuses. All staff liaisons serve in a volunteer capacity and are commonly referred to as UC Center Sacramento campus reps. The UC Center Sacramento staff liaisons and UC Center Sacramento outreach and program coordinators work collaboratively to promote the UC Center Sacramento program at every UC campus with an undergraduate student body.

Application Process

In order to participate in UC Center Sacramento, UC undergraduate students have to submit an application. The application consists of basic demographic information, a personal statement about their interest in public service, a copy of their unofficial transcripts, and a list of references. UC Center Sacramento applicants must have junior or senior academic standing at their home UC campus or sophomore standing with two completed upper division courses with a

B or better. The center requires that all participants be UC undergraduate-degree-seeking students. Students who attend UC Center Sacramento come from all majors, although students majoring in political science have consistently been represented the most each term. UC Center Sacramento applications are reviewed holistically both by UC Center Sacramento staff liaisons and the program and outreach coordinators at UC Center Sacramento and by the center's associate director and director.

Internship

UC Center Sacramento students participate in an internship for 20+ hours per week. Internship placement is coordinated by UC Center Sacramento's associate director. The internship placement process at UC Center Sacramento is unique in that the burden of finding an internship does not rest on the UC Center Sacramento student alone. Following best practices as related to promoting accessibility and equity, the UC Center Sacramento internship placement process does not rely on a student's existing social capital (Hora, 2022). The center's associate director meets with each incoming UC Center Sacramento student to find out their substantive interests as well as career goals and matches students directly with internships in the Sacramento policy community. This process includes:

1. Program overview webinar hosted by the UC Center Sacramento associate director and UC Center Sacramento program and outreach coordinators.
2. Professional development webinars focused on resumes and preparing for interviews hosted by the UC Center Sacramento associate director and UC Center Sacramento program and outreach coordinators.
3. One-on-one interviews with the associate director and/or UC Center Sacramento program and outreach coordinators to discuss substantive policy areas of interest, type

- of internship (executive branch, legislative, state agency, or nonprofit), mode of internship (in person, remote, or hybrid) and plans after graduation.
4. Support in the form of a resume review with feedback and mock interview by UC Center Sacramento program and outreach coordinators in preparation for an interview with an internship host site.
 5. Referral to an internship host site that has committed to hosting a UC Center Sacramento student intern for the term and guaranteed an interview for the student. These internship host sites are arranged in advance by the UC Center Sacramento associate director and the identification of host site locations is driven by UC Center Sacramento student interest.
 6. The UC Center Sacramento student reaches out to the internship host site supervisor and arranges for an interview after they receive their referral and then completes their interview. Upon interview completion the UC Center Sacramento student is offered the internship. In rare circumstances in which the UC Center Sacramento student is not offered an internship, steps 2 through 6 are repeated.

UC Center Sacramento students also attend weekly professional development workshops on topics such as professional networking, resume building and interviewing, how to apply to graduate school, prelaw panel, and how to get a state job.

Academic Courses

In addition to their internship and professional development workshops, UC Center Sacramento students participate in a rigorous set of academic courses. As part of the UC Center Sacramento coursework, UC Center Sacramento students are expected to complete an independent research project using a publicly available data set along with substantial writing

assignments. At the end of each term, UC Center Sacramento students present their academic research project in the form of a poster presentation at UC Center Sacramento's quarterly undergraduate research showcase. In addition to the center's academic course offerings, UC Center Sacramento students have been traditionally expected to participate in the center's weekly speaker series as part of the program's knowledge sharing mission.

Knowledge Sharing

The second part of UC Center Sacramento's mission has been to share knowledge in the support of public policy making. This is done in collaboration with UC faculty and research centers. UC Center Sacramento has traditionally hosted a regular UC Center Sacramento Wednesday Speaker Series for close to a decade. Guest speakers who participate in the UC Center Sacramento Wednesday Speaker Series include UC faculty members as well as practitioners from the executive branch, legislature, state agencies, and Sacramento policy community. Talks are by a single UC faculty speaker, a UC faculty speaker with practitioner, or a three- to five-person panel with moderator. The UC Center Sacramento Wednesday Speaker Series is intended to share knowledge in support of public policy making and serves as an avenue to highlight UC faculty research and the importance of UC research in evidence-based policy making.

The UC Center Sacramento Wednesday Speaker Series has been historically open to the public. Prepandemic (before March of 2020) talks were held in person only. During the pandemic (2020–2022), the talks pivoted online to a Zoom platform. Postpandemic (2022–2024), the talks were offered in a hybrid format: both in person and online via Zoom. Attendees often were from the legislative and Sacramento policy community. Typically, the UC Center Sacramento Wednesday Speakers, held on Wednesdays from 12 to 1 p.m., regularly attracted

100 to 200 attendees. The programming and event logistics for the Wednesday Speaker Series were managed by UC Center Sacramento's director, associate director, and marketing and events manager.

It is important to also acknowledge the history of UC Center Sacramento, as it provides a foundation for understanding the research setting. Please see Appendix A, a memo written by immediate past UC Center Sacramento director Dr. Richard Kravitz, with a historical outline of the creation and evolution of UC Center Sacramento.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

I addressed my research question on how University of California Center Sacramento (UC Center Sacramento) alumni rate their experiences in the UC Center Sacramento program and UC Center Sacramento internship through a survey-based approach using UC Center Sacramento as a case study (Bhattacharya, 2017). To understand the UC Center Sacramento alumni experience, I used a single case study design (Yin, 2018) with data collection through a Qualtrics survey instrument and application artifacts. Through my research, I addressed the following questions:

1. Who participates in UC Center Sacramento, in terms of demographics and socioeconomic characteristics?
2. How do UC Center Sacramento alumni rate their experiences in the UC Center Sacramento program and the UC Center Sacramento internship? How does this vary by student race/ethnicity?
3. What barriers to participation and enrollment do UC Center Sacramento alumni identify?

The use of UC Center Sacramento as a case study was driven by my proposed research question. The case study method is used to understand how and why questions. It does not require control over behavioral events, and focuses on contemporary events (Yin, 2018). Case studies, similar to experiments, are generalizable to theoretical propositions, either analytic or statistical, and not to populations or universes (Yin, 2018). The proposed research question was aimed at understanding UC Center Sacramento participant perceptions as a contemporary event, and so the ideal method for answering the research question is the case study method.

Application Data Collection and Analysis Process: Research Question 1

To answer my first research question on who participates in UC Center Sacramento, the first step of my data collection process included transferring and inputting printed data from UC Center Sacramento paper applications (fall 2010 through summer 2020) of admitted and matriculated UC Center Sacramento students into an electronic admissions database and cleaning and organizing the data. Prior to this, the center did not have an electronic admissions data set or database. For the summer 2020 through the winter 2024 term, the demographic data were pulled from a web-based report through a new UC Center Sacramento online application program hosted by eResources and imported into STATA for analysis. Data were pulled only on matriculated students, so these records reflect the characteristics of program participants. The final data set included 1,463 records on participants who applied between fall 2010 and winter 2024, with 1,103 paper applications and 360 online applications for summer 2020 and beyond. Similarly, I analyzed the matriculated student applications data from paper forms.

My data sets created from both the electronic admissions data and paper student applications included the following background variables: gender (male, female; a nonbinary option was offered but had too few responses to be analyzed), ethnicity (Chicanx/Latinx; White/Caucasian; Asian American and Pacific Islander; other, which includes Native American due to the small number of Native American applicants; and Black/African American), and financial aid eligibility (whether a matriculated student did or did not receive financial aid). For matriculated students who applied online, I also looked at Pell grant status (whether a matriculated student did or did not receive a Pell grant, and also recorded nonresponses) and first-generation college status (whether or not a matriculated student was a first-generation college student; first-generation college student status is defined by having parents who did not

receive a bachelor's degree or equivalent). Pell grant status and first-generation college status data were not collected on paper applications and so analyses for these questions reflect only matriculated students who applied using the UC Center Sacramento online application system. I also tabulated the top five most popular majors for UC Center Sacramento matriculated students from data available from admitted students who applied to UC Center Sacramento using UC Center Sacramento's online application.

Application Data Collection and Analysis Process: Research Questions 2 and 3

For Research Question 2, on how UC Center Sacramento alumni rate their experiences in the UC Center Sacramento program and UC Center Sacramento internship, and Research Question 3, on what barriers to participation and enrollment UC Center Sacramento alumni identify as encountering and whether this varies by student race/ethnicity, I relied on survey data that were gathered through a Qualtrics survey sent to all UC Center Sacramento alumni for whom the program had current email addresses.

Survey Data Collection

To answer my second and third research questions and understand the UC Center Sacramento alumni experience as well as barriers faced by UC Center Sacramento alumni, I created a survey using an online accessible survey platform, Qualtrics. Qualtrics is a web-based platform used to distribute surveys and is an approved University of California software program for survey distribution. The survey questions included the following categories: demographic/background questions, UC Center Sacramento experience questions (academic, internship, and professional development and support services), and postgraduation questions. A uniform set of questions was asked of each participant. The survey questions were pilot tested and validated by a subset of UC Center Sacramento alumni, the UC Center Sacramento Alumni

Council, in the spring of 2024, and the survey was administered to all UC Center Sacramento alumni shortly afterwards.

The survey targeted students who had participated in UC Center Sacramento. Participants were all University of California (UC) degree-seeking undergraduate students from one of the nine UC campuses with undergraduate students. The students included applied and were selected by UC Center Sacramento's admissions committee to participate in UC Center Sacramento for one term (either quarter or semester depending on their home campus) during a 14-year period from 2010 to 2024. The participation period starts in 2010 because the current UC Center Sacramento program structure was implemented in the fall of 2010.

An initial email was sent to all UC Center Sacramento alumni by the director of UC Center Sacramento using the UC Center Sacramento alumni e-mail list to let potential participants know that a survey would be sent to them. This email was sent 1 week prior to the survey being distributed to increase response rates. This was followed a week later by an email from the director inviting UC Center Sacramento alumni to participate in the survey, along with the Qualtrics survey link. The survey was emailed to all UC Center Sacramento alumni using an alumni email list maintained by UC Center Sacramento for all program alumni for whom the center had a validated email address. The Qualtrics survey was collected over a 3-week period. A reminder was sent to all potential participants once a week during this 3-week period to increase participation. All data collected were stored on a password-protected network drive. There were 1,103 paper applications and 360 online applications, with a total of 1,463 possible respondents. It is important to note that email addresses were not available for all possible respondents. The UC Center Sacramento alumni email list has over 1,500 email addresses; however, some were for students outside of the period of study, and some were duplicated, as UC Center Sacramento

alumni often provide both a UC campus email address and a personal email address. There were 188 survey respondents; however, it is important to note that not all respondents answered each survey question. Data from respondents were still used in the data analysis even if some of their responses were missing.

Measures and Methods

I cleaned and coded the data sets prior to analyzing the data using STATA. STATA is a statistical software designed for data analysis and management, visualization, and automated reporting (stata.com). I focused on six main data categories collected through the survey: sources of information on UC Center Sacramento; barriers to participation; program experience data (academic experiences; internship experiences; professional development experiences); postgraduation outcomes data; overall program satisfaction and evaluation; and background characteristics. I describe each of these areas in turn, ordered by research questions.

Analysis for Research Question 2: UC Center Sacramento Alumni Rate Their Experiences in the UC Center Sacramento Program

To evaluate how UC Center Sacramento alumni from 2010 through 2024 rated their experiences in the UC Center Sacramento program, they were asked about their experiences with the following areas: academic, internship, and professional development. These areas were identified because UC Center Sacramento's program structure, which has been in place since fall 2010, includes these three main program components. Although UC Center Sacramento started in 2004, the center does not have quantitative or qualitative data on the student experience.

Students were asked about the extent to which they agree with different statements. For instance, with respect to academic experiences, students were asked about UC Center Sacramento instructors; whether they gained research, communication, and critical thinking

skills; and whether they found the UC Center Sacramento courses to be useful for their career. In analyzing the data, codes were assigned to responses. A value of 1 was used for responses of *strongly disagree*, 2 for *somewhat disagree*, 3 for *neither agree nor disagree*, 4 for *somewhat agree*, and 5 for *strongly agree*.

Postgraduation Outcomes Data. In addition to lacking alumni perception data, UC Center Sacramento does not systematically track student postgraduation outcomes. Through my survey, I asked questions related to postgraduation outcomes for UC Center Sacramento participants. Survey questions focused on employment as well as graduate school. Participants were asked about their main activity after graduation: employment, graduate or professional school, other, or not applicable. They were also asked how long it took to secure their first job postgraduation. Response options included secured employment prior to graduation, within 3 months of graduation, 3 to 6 months after graduation, 7 to 12 months after graduation, more than 12 months after graduation, did not seek employment postgraduation, and not applicable (currently completing undergraduate degree). Participants were also asked what employment sector their first job was in: for-profit; nonprofit, government (city, county, state agency); legislative, executive, or judicial branch; other, and not applicable (currently completing undergraduate degree). Similarly, participants were asked about the employment sector of their current job. Participants were also asked whether they had completed graduate training in the following areas: master's degree, doctoral degree, law degree, other graduate and professional school, or no graduate school. In my analysis section, I tabulated each variable to show the share of alumni who reported each postgraduation outcome.

Overall Satisfaction and Qualitative Evaluation of Experience. For overall student satisfaction with UC Center Sacramento, I included both a quantitative and qualitative response.

For the quantitative overall satisfaction question, survey respondents were asked to select a number on a 1–5 Likert scale with 5 being *extremely satisfied*, 4 *somewhat satisfied*, 3 *neither satisfied nor dissatisfied*, 2 *somewhat dissatisfied*, and 1 *extremely dissatisfied*. I then reported the number of students in each category.

To capture the qualitative aspects of program satisfaction, I asked an optional open-ended question asking UC Center Sacramento alumni to describe the ways in which UC Center Sacramento had impacted their career journey. A significant number of survey respondents responded to the open-ended question (88 of 188), and through qualitative analysis we can learn from these voices (Miles et al., 2019). I exported all of the survey respondent quotes from the Qualtrics survey to a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to inform the themes that emerged. Then I went through and coded each quote by the themes that emerged using 0 and 1 variables, with 0 indicating the absence of the theme within the quote and 1 indicating its presence. The seven themes that emerged through qualitative analysis were the following: UC Center Sacramento helped clarify future career and/or educational goals; UC Center Sacramento provided and/or enhanced skills for postgraduation opportunities; UC Center Sacramento played a positive role in mentorship, networking, and relationship building; the UC Center Sacramento experience was a pivotal part of their career journey or professional development; the UC Center Sacramento experience gave program participants a sense of belonging in the public service and policy community space; UC Center Sacramento provided resume-building opportunities; and lastly, participating in UC Center Sacramento gave program participants confidence and a feeling of preparedness for graduate school or a career. The top themes that emerged from these quotes are shared in the analysis section along with direct supporting quotes

Analysis for Research Question 3: Program Information and Barriers to Participation

As part of my dissertation research, it is important to understand the barriers to participation that students faced, and what students reported they had to overcome. If experiential learning is to benefit all students, barriers to participation must be considered and addressed. Included in the Qualtrics survey were questions on possible barriers to participation, which included both institutional and non-institutional barriers. Students were asked to identify whether various factors (such as financial constraints or finding housing in Sacramento, among others) were barriers to participation. Students who agreed that a given factor was a barrier received a value of 1 for that variable; those who did not endorse an item received a value of 0. I provide the mean that endorsed each barrier. In analyzing the data, I also included results for barriers broken down by each of six different race/ethnicity groups: Latinx/Chicanx, Asian American and Pacific Islander, White/Caucasian, Black/African American, multiracial/multiethnic, and other. I provide more detail below about the way that students were categorized in these demographic subgroups.

Background Data

It is critically important to understand the student population that UC Center Sacramento is serving and build upon attracting students from diverse communities. I asked questions on student background, which I used both to characterize the sample and to break down responses by student race/ethnicity groups. Demographic categories included gender data (male, female, nonbinary/third gender, decline to state), race/ethnicity data (Black/African American, Asian American, Chicanx/Latinx, Native American, Pacific Islander, White/Caucasian, other), financial aid and Pell Grant recipient status as an undergraduate student (yes, no, or do not recall), first-generation college status (parents did not receive a bachelor's degree or equivalent), and first-

generation professional status (first in their family in a professional occupation or an occupation that requires advanced training and/or education). For race/ethnicity data, multiracial/multiethnic is represented when one or more race/ethnicity categories were selected. In order for participants to remain anonymous, some race/ethnicity categories were combined.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The purpose of this study is to look at the relationships between high-impact practices such as experiential learning and the role of higher education based on participant ratings using University of California Center Sacramento (UC Center Sacramento) as a case study. UC Center Sacramento is a University of California (UC) system-wide undergraduate internship-based experiential learning program based in Sacramento and open to all UC undergraduate students. This study includes a quantitative and qualitative analysis of UC Center Sacramento admissions data to understand the demographics UC Center Sacramento participants, as well as a survey sent to all UC Center Sacramento alumni from fall 2010 to winter 2024 to solicit information on students' experiences in the program.

Research Question 1: Who Participates in UC Center Sacramento?

To answer this question, I analyzed applicant data from UC Center Sacramento matriculated students from fall 2010 through winter 2024. I combined data sets from UC Center Sacramento paper applications and online applications for this period to mirror the period of attendance of the Qualtrics survey respondents.

UC Center Sacramento Matriculated Student Profile

Using combined data sets from both UC Center Sacramento paper applications and online applications from the fall of 2010 through the winter of 2024 in order to mirror the time period of attendance of the Qualtrics survey respondents, my analysis found that matriculated UC Center Sacramento students were nearly two-thirds female (Table 1). Racially, matriculants were diverse, with 33% Latinx/Chicanx, 25% Asian American and Pacific Islander, 25%

White/Caucasian, and 4% African American students; and the vast majority (82%) of UC Center Sacramento students received financial aid.

Table 1. *UCCS Matriculated Student Profile (Gender, Ethnicity, and Financial Aid)*

Characteristic	<i>n</i>	%
Gender		
Female	870	65
Male	474	35
Nonbinary/third gender	0	0
Race/ethnicity		
Chicanx/Latinx	418	33
White/Caucasian	320	25
Asian American	262	20
Other ^a	174	14
Pacific Islander	60	5
Black/African American	46	4
Undergraduate student financial aid status		
Yes (received financial aid)	1,140	82
No (did not receive financial aid)	252	18

Note. Based on 1463 UCCS admitted student applications from fall 2010 through winter 2024; however, not all applications provided a response to each demographic category. Applications submitted either on paper or online. UCCS = University of California Center Sacramento.

^a Native American combined with Other due to response rate of less than 10.

Table 2 adds to the demographic profile of matriculated UC Center Sacramento students by reporting Pell Grant status and first-generation college student status of online applicants. It is important to note that these two demographic questions were asked only of online applicants to the UC Center Sacramento program, and thus these data are not available for those who used the paper application. Of these matriculated UC Center Sacramento students, 41% self-reported that they had received a Pell Grant and 44% shared that they were a first-generation college student. Although the number of respondents who indicated that they were not a first-generation college student was higher than those who reported that they were, 44% is still meaningful in magnitude, as it represents over a third of the UC students attending UC Center Sacramento.

Table 2. *UCCS Matriculated Student Profile (Pell Grant Status and First-Generation College Student Status)*

Characteristic	<i>n</i>	%
Pell Grant status		
Yes (received Pell Grant)	149	41
No (did not receive Pell Grant)	144	40
No response	67	19
First-generation college student ^a		
No	202	56
Yes	158	44
No response	0	0

Note. Based on 360 UCCS admitted student online applications from fall 2010 through winter 2024; however, not all applications provided a response to each demographic category. Percentages based on respondents by category (Pell Grant and first-generation college student status). Respondent numbers vary by category. UCCS = University of California Center Sacramento.

^a First-generation college student status defined by having parents who did not receive a bachelor's degree or equivalent.

Another question that was added through the UC Center Sacramento online application is student's major (Table 3). In analyzing the data, the vast majority of UC Center Sacramento admitted students from fall 2010 through winter 2024 came from the following five majors: political science, public service, public affairs, and policy (63%); economics, business, finance, and statistics (6%); sociology (5%); criminology and legal studies (4%); and environmental science (3%). However, other majors were also listed by matriculated UC Center Sacramento students who applied online and so this list is not exhaustive. It is important to note that data on majors were available only for UC Center Sacramento applicants who applied online and not for those who applied using the paper application form.

Table 3. *UCCS Matriculated Students by Major (Top 5)*

Major	<i>n</i>	%
Political science, public service, public affairs, policy	227	78
Economics, business, finance, statistics	21	7
Sociology	19	6
Criminology and legal studies	14	5
Environmental science	12	4

Note. Based on 360 UCCS admitted student online applications from fall 2010 through winter 2024. Major data were available only for online applicants and not for applicants who applied using the paper application form. UCCS = University of California Center Sacramento.

In summary, a majority of UC Center Sacramento’s matriculated students were female, and the largest ethnicity group participating in UC Center Sacramento from fall 2010 through spring 2024 was Latinx/Chicanx. A significant proportion (41%) of UC Center Sacramento matriculated students who applied using UC Center Sacramento’s online application received Pell Grants. UC Center Sacramento also served an impressive proportion of first-generation college students (44%).

Research Question 2: How Do UC Center Sacramento Alumni Rate Their Experiences in the UC Center Sacramento Program and UC Center Sacramento Internship? How Does This Vary by Student Race/Ethnicity?

To answer my second research question and understand the UC Center Sacramento alumni experience, I drew on data from the Qualtrics survey administered during the spring quarter of 2024. Before turning to those data, I first report background characteristics of survey participants. In analyzing the demographic data of UC Center Sacramento alumni who participated in the survey (Table 4), I found that that there were more female (64%) than male respondents (36%); the largest ethnicity group that responded to the survey was White/Caucasian (29%), with Latinx/Chicanx (24%) and Asian American and Pacific Islander (23%) alumni also well represented. The majority of those who responded to the survey were financial aid

recipients (68%), with 48% reporting that they received Pell Grants. In addition, 41% of survey respondents were first-generation college students. There were a number of nonresponses to the survey's background questions, likely due to these questions being placed intentionally at the end of the survey, and these observations are excluded for questions for which they do not provide data. It is important to note that respondents who did not complete the survey dropped off at the demographic section of the survey. As shown in Table 5, the demographic composition of the survey respondents was similar in gender to that of matriculated UC Center Sacramento students. There was slight variation by ethnicity and financial aid status.

Table 4. *UCCS Survey Respondent Profile (Gender, Ethnicity, Financial Aid, Pell Grant, and First-Generation College Student Status)*

Characteristic	<i>n</i>	%
Gender		
Female	86	64
Male	48	36
Ethnicity ^a		
White/Caucasian	41	29
Chicanx/Latinx	34	24
Asian American and Pacific Islander	32	23
Multiracial/multiethnic	27	19
Other	5	4
Black/African American	3	2
Financial aid status		
Yes (received financial aid)	96	68
No (did not receive financial aid)	45	32
Pell Grant status		
No (did not receive Pell Grant)	67	52
Yes (received Pell Grant)	61	48
First-generation college student status ^b		
No	86	59
Yes	60	41

Note. Based on 188 UCCS survey respondents. Actual survey respondent numbers vary by category. Not all survey respondents provided a response to each demographic category. Percentages based on respondents by category (Pell Grant and first-generation college student status). UCCS = University of California Center Sacramento.

^a Ethnicity is self-reported and respondents could select multiple ethnicities. If multiple ethnicities were selected, this is reported as multiracial/multiethnic. Due to a low number of respondents for Pacific Islander, Pacific Islander is combined with Asian American in order to maintain anonymity and confidentiality. No Native American survey respondents to report.

^b First-generation college student status defined by having parents who did not receive a bachelor's degree or equivalent.

Table 5. Demographic Comparison Between Matriculated UCCS students and the UCCS Survey Respondent Profile (Gender, Ethnicity, and Financial Aid)

Characteristic	Matriculated UCCS students, %	UCCS survey respondents, %
Gender		
Female	65	64
Male	35	36
Race/ethnicity ^a		
Chicanx/Latinx	33	24
White/Caucasian	25	29
Asian American and Pacific Islander	25	23
Other	14	23
Black/African American	4	2
Undergraduate student financial aid status		
Yes (received financial aid)	82	68
No (did not receive financial aid)	18	32

Note. Matriculated UCCS students column based on 1463 UCCS admitted student applications from fall 2010 through winter 2024; however, not all applications provided a response to each demographic category. UCCS cohorts fall 2010 through winter 2024 by gender, ethnicity, and financial aid status. Applications submitted either by paper or online. Not all survey respondents provided a response to each demographic category. UCCS survey respondents column based on 188 UCCS survey respondents. Actual survey respondent numbers vary by category. Percentages based on respondents by category. Respondent numbers vary by category. UCCS = University of California Center Sacramento.

^a Ethnicity is self-reported and respondents could select multiple ethnicities. If multiple ethnicities were selected then this is reported as multiracial/multiethnic and included in the Other category. Due to a low number of respondents for Pacific Islander, Pacific Islander is combined with Asian American in order to maintain anonymity and confidentiality. Native American combined with Other in matriculated UCCS students column due to response rate of less than 10. No Native American survey respondents to report.

As shown in Table 6, the home campus for respondents varied. UC Davis had the highest level of respondents, which is in line with general attendance trend lines over the last decade at UC Center Sacramento. In recent years, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the UC Center Sacramento program saw fewer UC students leaving their home campus and participating in experiential learning opportunities, there were more undergraduate students from UC Davis versus other UC campuses, and these numbers are reflected in the campus

participation percentages below. It is important to note that UC Center Sacramento alumni from all of the UC undergraduate campuses participated in the Qualtrics survey.

Table 6. *Qualtrics Survey Respondents by University of California Home Campus*

Campus	%
Davis	42
Los Angeles	14
Santa Barbara	10
Riverside	9
Santa Cruz	9
San Diego	5
Berkeley	4
Irvine	4
Merced	3

Note. Based on 188 University of California Center Sacramento survey respondents. Actual survey respondents vary by category.

UC Center Sacramento Survey Student Experience (Academic, Internships, and Professional Development)

In addition to analyzing the demographic profile of UC Center Sacramento matriculated students through paper and online applications from fall 2010 to winter 2024 in answer to my first research question about who participates in UC Center Sacramento, I looked at answering my second research question on how UC Center Sacramento alumni rate their experiences in the UC Center Sacramento program using data collected through an online Qualtrics survey. I focused on the three main elements of the UC Center Sacramento program: academic experiences, internship experiences, and experiences with professional development programming, in addition to questions around post-UC Center Sacramento employment. The three main program elements have been central to the current UC Center Sacramento program structure since fall 2010.

Students were asked about the extent to which they agreed with different statements regarding their experiences with these elements, with 1 representing *strongly disagree* and 5

representing *strongly agree*. The first column of each table reflects the full sample mean and standard deviation on this Likert variable for each question. Subsequent columns are broken down by ethnicity (Latinx/Chicanx, Asian American and Pacific Islander, White/Caucasian, Black/African American, other, and multiracial/multiethnic). Table rows are ordered so that the items with highest agreement are presented first.

Academic Experiences. All UC Center Sacramento students enroll as full-time students in UC Center Sacramento-specific courses. As part of the UC Center Sacramento coursework, students are expected to complete an independent research project using a publicly available data set, along with substantial writing assignments. At the end of each term, students present their academic research project in the form of a poster presentation at UC Center Sacramento's quarterly undergraduate research showcase. Respondents reported on their ratings of the helpfulness of various elements of this academic program (Table 7).

Respondents across all ethnicity groups reported high agreement with items asking whether they had knowledgeable instructors at UC Center Sacramento (full group mean = 4.5) and agreed that they gained valuable research skills (full group mean = 4.32) as part of their UC Center Sacramento experience. Survey respondents had lower average agreement that the UC Center Sacramento courses were useful to their career (full group mean = 3.79) than that they had gained communication skills (full group mean = 4.05) and critical thinking skills (full group mean = 4.03) through their UC Center Sacramento courses. When these results are disaggregated, there are slight differences across race/ethnic groups. For instance, the mean is lower and less than 4 for gained critical thinking skills for Black/African American and other-race/ethnicity students. The mean is less than 4 for gained communication skills for the other-race/ethnicity group. It is important to note, though, that the numbers of observations in both

Black/African American and other-race/ethnicity categories are low (<15 respondents) and so results may not be fully representative.

Table 7. UCCS Academic Experience

	(1) Full sample	(2) White/ Caucasian	(3) Latinx /Chicanx	(4) Asian American and Pacific Islander	(5) Multiracial/m ultiethnic	(6) Other	(7) Black/ African American
Statement	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>
Knowledgeable instructors	4.50 (0.71)	4.58 (0.62)	4.61 (0.70)	4.48 (0.55)	4.63 (0.56)	4.31 (0.85)	4.56 (0.73)
Gained research skills	4.32 (0.93)	4.45 (0.78)	4.39 (0.84)	4.24 (0.86)	4.33 (0.83)	4.08 (1.19)	4.56 (0.53)
Gained communication skills	4.05 (1.00)	4.18 (0.82)	4.12 (1.09)	4.05 (0.85)	4.00 (1.11)	3.85 (1.21)	4.00 (1.32)
Gained critical thinking skills	4.03 (0.96)	4.16 (0.93)	4.17 (0.86)	4.05 (0.82)	4.04 (1.02)	3.46 (1.20)	3.89 (1.05)
Useful in my career	3.79 (1.21)	3.83 (1.21)	3.94 (1.22)	3.83 (1.15)	4.08 (1.10)	3.40 (1.51)	3.78 (1.30)
Observations	147	62	49	42	27	13	9

Note. Variables represent means on a 1–5 Likert scale with 5 being *strongly agree*, 4 *somewhat agree*, 3 *neutral*, 2 *somewhat disagree*, and 1 *strongly disagree*. Based on 188 UCCS survey respondents. Actual survey respondent numbers vary by category and affirmative responses only are shown by category. Ethnicity is self-reported and respondents could select multiple ethnicities. If multiple ethnicities were selected, this is reported as multiracial/multiethnic. Due to a low number of respondents for Pacific Islander, Pacific Islander is combined with Asian American in order to maintain anonymity and confidentiality. No Native American respondents to report. Row labels have been shortened. For full questions see Appendix B. UCCS = University of California Center Sacramento.

Internship Experiences. UC Center Sacramento students participate in an internship for 20+ hours per week. Internship placement is coordinated by UC Center Sacramento's associate director. The center's associate director meets with each incoming UC Center Sacramento student to learn more about their substantive interests as well as career goals and matches students directly with internships in the Sacramento policy community. Typical UC Center Sacramento internships include placements with California executive branch offices, legislative offices, state agencies, and nonprofits. Internships can be done in person, remotely, or in hybrid format. The internship mode is determined by the internship host site.

Among survey respondents, 71% of UC Center Sacramento alumni participated in their internship in person, 18% participated in their internship virtually, and 11% of UC participated in their internship in a hybrid format. It is important to note that prior to the global health pandemic in 2020, all UC Center Sacramento internships were in person. During the 2020–2021 and a part of the 2021–2022 academic years, most internship host sites operated only virtually. Post pandemic, many internship host sites have been offering internships in person or in a hybrid format (a combination of in person and virtual), with a few continuing to operate virtually.

Overall, UC Center Sacramento alumni found their UC Center Sacramento internship experience to be positive (Table 8): In particular, alumni gave high agreement ratings to the statement that the internship was valuable to their career (full sample mean = 4.29). UC Center Sacramento alumni found that they gained communication skills (full sample mean = 4.21), gained confidence (full sample mean = 4.20), expanded their professional network (full sample mean = 4.13), and received mentorship (full sample mean = 4.08) from their internship experiences.

These positive results were generally seen across all ethnicity groups except for the other

ethnicity category when the data are disaggregated. The other ethnicity category appears to be an outlier for which generally the mean for each survey question is lower in comparison to other ethnicity groups. It is important to note, though, that the number of observations for the Other column is low (<13 respondents) and so results may be somewhat sensitive to individual observations due to low sample size for this category.

Table 8. *UCCS Internship Experience*

Statement	(1) Full sample	(2) White/ Caucasian	(3) Latinx/ Chicanx	(4) Asian American and Pacific Islander	(5) Multiracial/ multiethnic	(6) Other	(7) Black/ African American
	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>
Valuable to my career	4.29 (1.10)	4.30 (1.09)	4.38 (1.07)	4.34 (0.99)	4.35 (1.02)	3.91 (1.51)	4.11 (1.36)
Gained communication skills	4.21 (0.99)	4.24 (0.95)	4.12 (1.12)	4.27 (0.71)	4.04 (1.22)	4.00 (1.22)	4.33 (1.12)
Gained confidence	4.20 (0.98)	4.19 (1.02)	4.35 (0.87)	4.24 (0.77)	4.22 (1.05)	3.85 (1.21)	4.11 (1.17)
Expanded professional network	4.13 (1.24)	4.15 (1.31)	4.16 (1.22)	4.22 (1.13)	4.12 (1.31)	3.58 (1.56)	4.00 (1.41)
Received valuable mentorship	4.08 (1.16)	4.15 (1.19)	4.11 (1.18)	4.07 (1.03)	4.15 (1.17)	3.46 (1.61)	4.11 (1.36)
Gained critical thinking skills	4.03 (1.07)	4.02 (1.14)	4.06 (1.03)	4.10 (0.92)	3.93 (1.14)	3.54 (1.27)	4.22 (0.97)
Gained research skills	4.03(1.05)	4.03 (1.08)	4.08 (1.09)	3.95 (1.00)	4.00 (1.04)	3.83 (0.83)	4.11 (0.78)
Made Sacramento community connection	3.97 (1.33)	4.02 (1.38)	3.91 (1.44)	4.05 (1.20)	4.11 (1.37)	3.62 (1.61)	4.00 (1.32)
Learned to work in a team environment	3.92 (1.13)	3.95 (1.15)	4.06 (0.99)	3.88 (1.09)	3.85 (1.13)	3.58 (1.31)	3.89 (0.93)
Observations	145	62	49	41	27	13	9

Note. Variables represent means on a 1–5 Likert scale with 5 being *strongly agree*, 4 *somewhat agree*, 3 *neither agree nor disagree*, 2 *somewhat disagree*, and 1 *strongly disagree*. Based on 188 UCCS survey respondents. Actual survey respondent numbers vary by category. Affirmative responses only are shown by category. Ethnicity is self-reported and respondents could select multiple ethnicities. If multiple ethnicities were selected, this is reported as multiracial/multiethnic. Due to a low number of respondents for Pacific Islander, Pacific Islander is combined with Asian American in order to maintain anonymity and confidentiality. No Native American respondents to report. Row labels have been shortened. For full questions see Appendix B. UCCS = University of California Center Sacramento.

Experiences With Professional Development Programming. In addition to the academic and internship experiences at UC Center Sacramento, the program offers cocurricular programming in the form of professional development assistance and support. UC Center Sacramento hosts professional development webinars and in-person sessions around professionalism and communication, reviews a student's resume, and helps UC Center Sacramento students prepare for interviews by doing mock interviews. These activities are led by the UC Center Sacramento staff and guest speakers. UC Center Sacramento students also attend weekly professional development workshops while attending UC Center Sacramento for a term on topics such as professional networking, resume building and interviewing, how to apply to graduate school, prelaw panel, and how to get a state job.

UC Center Sacramento alumni across all ethnicity groups had a fairly high level of agreement that the UC Center Sacramento professional development support contributed to their career satisfaction (full sample mean = 3.88; Table 9), the most highly rated item in this scale. Notably, this area was lower in ratings than the most highly endorsed items about the other aspects of UC Center Sacramento programming, specifically the academic program and internship program. However, when the data are disaggregated by ethnicity, UC Center Sacramento alumni who identified as Latinx/Chicanx or Asian American and Pacific Islander rated UC Center Sacramento's contribution to their career satisfaction to be higher (4.02 and 3.95 respectively) than across all ethnicity groups as a whole.

UC Center Sacramento alumni were relatively consistent in the rating of their experiences with UC Center Sacramento's extended curriculum activities, support services, and student services, with full sample results indicating middling agreement with the utility of these services, ranging from 3.46 to 3.50. When disaggregated by ethnicity, it is important to note that

Black/African American and Other race/ethnicity group respondents in general had lower ratings of their UC Center Sacramento professional development experience in comparison with other groups. I recommend further research in this area to understand why the professional development programming support was not rated as highly by UC Center Sacramento alumni and what additional resources could be provided during their time in the UC Center Sacramento program as well as after.

Table 9. *UCCS Professional Development Programming Experience*

Statement	(1) Full sample <i>M (SD)</i>	(2) White/ Caucasian <i>M (SD)</i>	(3) Latinx/Chi canx <i>M (SD)</i>	(4) Asian American/ Pacific Islander <i>M (SD)</i>	(5) Multiracial /multiethni c <i>M (SD)</i>	(6) Other <i>M (SD)</i>	(7) Black/ African American <i>M (SD)</i>
UCCS professional development programming contributed to career satisfaction	3.88 (1.23)	3.75 (1.35)	4.02 (1.25)	3.95 (0.97)	3.74 (1.37)	3.29 (1.70)	3.60 (1.67)
Extended curriculum activities were useful in exploring postgraduation opportunities	3.50 (1.31)	3.45 (1.40)	3.42 (1.38)	3.75 (1.11)	3.45 (1.47)	3.00 (1.56)	3.50 (1.64)
UCCS professional development activities helped launch career	3.49 (1.36)	3.34 (1.60)	3.59 (1.40)	3.67 (1.04)	3.37 (1.64)	2.86 (1.68)	2.83 (1.83)
Found UCCS student support services helpful in launching career	3.48 (1.46)	3.35 (1.54)	3.48 (1.60)	3.79 (1.15)	3.30 (1.59)	2.70 (1.42)	3.00 (1.87)
Found UCCS services valuable as a UCCS student	3.46 (1.26)	3.60 (1.26)	3.56 (1.29)	3.49 (1.07)	3.55 (1.26)	2.89 (1.54)	3.00 (1.41)
Observations	132	54	47	38	23	12	7

Note. Variables represent means on a 1–5 Likert scale with 5 being *strongly agree*, 4 *somewhat agree*, 3 *neither agree nor disagree*, 2 *somewhat disagree*, and 1 *strongly disagree*. Based on 188 UCCS survey respondents. Actual survey respondent numbers vary by category. Affirmative responses only are shown by category. Ethnicity is self-reported and respondents could select multiple ethnicities. If multiple ethnicities were selected then this is reported as multiracial/multiethnic. Due to a low number of respondents for Pacific Islander, Pacific Islander is combined with Asian American in order to maintain anonymity and confidentiality. No Native American respondents to report. Row labels have been shortened. For full questions see Appendix B. UCCS = University of California Center Sacramento.

Postgraduate Outcomes

In addition to questions about the UC Center Sacramento academic, internship, and professional development experiences, the Qualtrics survey included questions related to postgraduate experiences and outcomes for UC Center Sacramento alumni. Survey questions focused on current status (e.g., employment, graduate school, other). Employed respondents were asked about the time it took to secure their first job and about their current job sector (for profit, nonprofit, government, other, and not applicable). Respondents who were not currently pursuing graduate studies were asked whether they had completed a graduate degree and in what field.

As Table 10 shows, the vast majority of UC Center Sacramento alumni respondents were either employed or continued their education in graduate or professional school (93%). Of UC Center Sacramento alumni who were employed, many found employment after graduation from their UC home campus within 6 months (76%, Table 11), showing a relatively smooth transition from their time as a UC undergraduate student into the workforce. Among currently employed respondents, over half (55%) were employed in local, state, or federal government or a nonprofit (Table 12), which is important as it shows that a large number of UC Center Sacramento alumni go on to pursue public service roles, filling critical positions. UC Center Sacramento is developing a pipeline of future leaders for the local, state, and federal policy communities.

Table 10. *UCCS Alumni Current Status*

Status	<i>n</i>	%
Employment	92	70
Graduate or professional school	30	23
Other	9	7

Note. Based on 146 survey respondents out of 188 total survey respondents. Removed 15 survey respondents who selected not applicable (currently completing degree). Actual survey respondent numbers vary by category. UCCS = University of California Center Sacramento.

Table 11. *UCCS Survey Respondents by Time to Secure First Job After Graduation*

Time to secure first postgraduation job	<i>n</i>	%
Prior to graduation	40	31
Within 3 months of graduation	31	24
3–6 months after graduation	27	21
7–12 months after graduation	16	13
More than 12 months after graduation	6	5
I did not seek employment postgraduation	7	6

Note. Based on 145 survey respondents out of 188 total survey respondents. Actual survey respondent numbers vary by category. Removed 18 survey respondents who selected not applicable (currently completing degree). This survey question was asked of all survey respondents regardless of whether they reported current status of employment or graduate school. UCCS = University of California Center Sacramento.

Table 12. *UCCS Survey Respondents by Current Employment Sector*

Sector	<i>n</i>	%
Government (city, county, state)	28	23
For profit company or organization	26	21
Nonprofit	20	16
Legislative, executive, or judicial branch at the state or federal level	20	16
Other	28	23

Note. Based on 143 survey respondents out of 188 total survey respondents. Removed 21 survey respondents who selected not applicable (currently completing degree). Actual survey respondent numbers vary by category. UCCS = University of California Center Sacramento.

Of the survey respondents who indicated they were pursuing or had previously pursued graduate training (Table 13), 54% had previously received or were currently pursuing a master's degree (MPP, MPA, MA, MPH, EdM), 29% had received or were pursuing a law degree (JD), 8% had received or were pursuing a doctoral degree (PhD, MD, DVM, DDS, EdD), and 6% were pursuing other graduate or professional school training.

Table 13. UCCS Survey Respondents by Graduate Training

Graduate Training	<i>n</i>	%
Master's degree (MPP, MPA, MA, MPH, EdM)	34	54
Doctoral degree (PhD, MD, DVM, DDS, EdD)	5	8
Law degree (JD)	18	29
Other graduate or professional school training	6	10

Note. Based on 137 survey respondents out of 188 total survey respondents. Actual survey respondent numbers vary by category. UCCS = University of California Center Sacramento.

Overall Program Satisfaction and Qualitative Feedback

In addition to the specific questions related to experiences, a survey question was included that asked how satisfied UC Center Sacramento alumni were with their overall UC Center Sacramento experience. Variables represent means on a 1–5 Likert scale with 5 being *strongly agree*, 4 *somewhat agree*, 3 *neither agree nor disagree*, 2 *somewhat disagree*, and 1 *strongly disagree*. As Table 14 shows, UC Center Sacramento alumni were positively satisfied with their UC Center Sacramento experience (full sample mean = 4.25). Mean ratings of satisfaction were high (above 4.0) among all ethnicity groups with the exception of alumni who reported Other for race (Other mean = 3.67). Similar to prior tables, the number of respondents indicating Other was low (<12). As a result, results for this group may be somewhat less reliable, though this consistent set of findings also suggests the need for future research on this population.

Table 14. *UCCS Survey Respondents' Satisfaction with UCCS Overall*

Satisfaction	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
	Full sample	White/ Caucasian	Latinx/ Chicanx	Asian American/ Pacific Islander	Multiracial/ multiethnic	Other	Black/ African American
	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>
Overall satisfaction	4.25 (1.05)	4.43 (0.90)	4.28 (1.05)	4.29 (0.94)	4.37 (0.97)	3.67 (1.37)	4.00 (1.22)
Observations	141	61	46	42	27	12	9

Note. Variables represent means on a 1–5 Likert scale with 5 being *extremely satisfied*, 4 *somewhat satisfied*, 3 *neither satisfied nor dissatisfied*, 2 *somewhat dissatisfied*, and 1 *extremely dissatisfied*. Based on 188 UCCS survey respondents. Actual survey respondent numbers vary by category. Affirmative responses only are shown by category. Ethnicity is self-reported and respondents could select multiple ethnicities. If multiple ethnicities were selected then this is reported as multiracial/multiethnic. Due to a low number of respondents for Pacific Islander, Pacific Islander is combined with Asian American in order to maintain anonymity and confidentiality. No Native American respondents to report. UCCS = University of California Center Sacramento.

As part of the survey, an optional open-ended question asked UC Center Sacramento alumni to describe the ways in which UC Center Sacramento had impacted their career journey. A significant number of survey respondents (88 of 188) answered this open-ended question, often at great length. Excerpts could be coded as speaking to multiple themes; most responses were coded with multiple themes. The top five themes that emerged from these responses are listed below.

Theme 1: The UC Center Sacramento experience was a pivotal part of the respondent's career journey or professional development. The most consistent theme that emerged was the pivotal role that UC Center Sacramento played in the career journey or professional development of a UC Center Sacramento alumni. This aligns with the anecdotal feedback UC Center Sacramento faculty and staff often hear from alumni after their time in the program and as they progress in their career. As one respondent stated:

The best decision I ever made was applying to UCCS [UC Center Sacramento]. As an anthropology major, I knew little about CA [California] state policy and politics. The academic coursework and capstone gave me the foundation to thrive in my internship placement. The placement was perfect and connected me to the most caring and incredible people in Sacramento. They assisted me in getting financial stable in Sacramento and land my first real job in state service. It was the start to my 9-year career.

Through the open-ended responses, it is clear that the UC Center Sacramento experience allowed for career exploration, helped participants gain skills that they could apply to their future job, and often served as a launching point for career success. Another respondent shared that UC Center Sacramento “[gave] me the first internship that set me up for literally everything else. Also, gave me the chance to explore a potential career in public service and discovered I loved it.” Respondents who contributed to this theme credited UC Center Sacramento with providing

the foundation for their career success and related that they would not be where they are today had it not been for their time at UC Center Sacramento.

Theme 2: Participating in UC Center Sacramento clarified future career and/or educational goals. The second theme that emerged was that UC Center Sacramento provided participants with a clearer picture of what they might want to do after graduation. UC Center Sacramento allowed participants to see themselves in future roles in the state government or in public service. The experience also prompted them to think about various career or educational pathways. Sometimes, they had previously been aware that these paths existed, but some said they learned of opportunities that they did not know existed until their time at UC Center Sacramento. A respondent wrote:

The UCCS [UC Center Sacramento] program significantly impacted my career trajectory by deepening my interest in working for the state government. I enjoyed learning about many important aspects of the state of California, particularly the judicial appointment system. This experience sparked a serious interest in considering a future career as a judge. The insights and knowledge I gained through the program have inspired me to explore the various pathways and opportunities within state government and the judiciary.

Survey respondents who contributed to this theme shared that they were either unsure of what they wanted to do postgraduation prior to participating in the program, or that they thought that they knew what they wanted to do but their goals were clarified after participating in UC Center Sacramento. They shared that their time at UC Center Sacramento was inspirational as well as practical. Their career journey was enriched by the expansion of their professional network through UC Center Sacramento and they were provided greater access to career and postgraduation opportunities. Relatedly, another survey respondent shared:

I knew going into UCCS [UC Center Sacramento] that I wanted a career in state government, but the ability to do an internship in the legislature while receiving college credits for it was absolutely invaluable for gaining the knowledge and familiarity with the Sacramento policy scene that eventually led to my work with a state agency.

Although most survey respondents found their UC Center Sacramento experience to be in direct alignment to their career goals, it is also important to note that a few of the UC Center Sacramento alumni shared that through UC Center Sacramento, they found that public service and public policy was not a career avenue that they wanted to pursue. One survey respondent shared:

Participating in UCCS [UC Center Sacramento] helped me learn what I do and do not want from my future career. I was interested in policy, and went in to the program having very little experience, I don't regret having done the program, and I encourage UC students to partake. I did not end up working in policy, but rather as in higher education as a student affairs officer coordinator. While I don't focus on policy in my day to day work, my internship and participation in UCCS opened my eyes to how people are advocating at the state level and that policy impacts my day to day life, personally and professionally.

For this participant, as for several others, they found that the type of work they wanted to pursue was unrelated to their UC Center Sacramento internship. The UC Center Sacramento experience was still very valuable because it helped to inform them of their next steps postgraduation in a short amount of time, one term, prior to putting in the work to get a job in a field that would turn out not to be a good fit.

Theme 3: UC Center Sacramento participation provided and/or enhanced skills for postgraduation opportunities. The third theme that emerged from responses to the open-ended question was the valuable and transferable skills that students gained through their UC Center Sacramento experience. The positive experiences respondents shared were related to either the student's academic experience, their internship experience, or a combination of both. One respondent shared:

Throughout my UCCS [UC Center Sacramento] experience, I gained firsthand experience in a lobbying environment, which gave me transferable skills when I eventually went into law practice postgrad. Most important to me is that it connected me with people I now call my closest friends who are exceptionally bright, kind, and dedicated to public service. It also prepared me for the CA [California] State Assembly Jesse M. Unruh Fellowship.

Respondents shared that their UC Center Sacramento experience prepared them for the next step in their career journey. One respondent wrote:

Working during my time at UCCS [UC Center Sacramento] helped me learn how many careers are possible with my degree. I worked with the community design team conducting community outreach and now I work in the public outreach department for a water district.

Respondents wrote that what they gained from the UC Center Sacramento experience not only helped to prepare them for a career but also prepared them for graduate school, “UCCS [UC Center Sacramento] helped me prepare for my PhD program. As a first-generation and low-income student, UCCS introduced me to different postgraduation opportunities.”

Theme 4: The UC Center Sacramento experience provided an opportunity for networking and relationship building in the policy community. The fourth theme that emerged from the responses to the open-ended question was the connection to the Sacramento policy community and opportunity for networking. Respondents related that through their internship experience, they found that they could be active and valued participants in Sacramento and California public service and public policy. The UC Center Sacramento program format built with intentionality allowed them to receive college credit and remain eligible for financial aid, while also connecting them with internship sites and mentors. One respondent shared:

I knew going into UCCS [UC Center Sacramento] that I wanted a career in state government, but the ability to do an internship in the legislature while receiving college credits for it was absolutely invaluable for gaining the knowledge and the familiarity with the Sacramento policy scene that eventually led to my work with a state agency.

Respondents shared that being immersed in the Sacramento policy community and having the opportunities to make connections and build networks paved the way for their career. Another respondent wrote, “Just being here and making connections and relationships in the policy scene definitely informed my decision-making to get a state job right after graduation and how to speak the language of state policy.” Their experience as a UC Center Sacramento student opened the

door to future career possibilities and gave them the network they needed to pursue jobs postgraduation within the Sacramento policy community.

Theme 5: Participating in UC Center Sacramento provided mentorship and confidence. The fifth theme that emerged was the mentorship and confidence students gained while participating in UC Center Sacramento. Survey respondents shared that through their UC Center Sacramento academic and internship experiences, they were able to have built-in mentors academically through UC Center Sacramento faculty and staff and professionally through their internship host site.

UCCS [UC Center Sacramento] introduced me to career pathways that I was not aware of. My mentors inside the program showed me a whole new world of possibilities and I am beyond grateful for the experience.

Additionally, respondents shared that they were able to go beyond building their resume and also were able to build and expand their professional networks as part of the UC Center Sacramento experience.

I felt more confident pursuing opportunities after participating in UCCS [UC Center Sacramento]. I felt like it was a great stepping stone. Additionally, the program (the cohort, directors, and staff) made me feel supported, understood, and like I had found a like-minded, public service-oriented community. Really grateful for my time at UCCS.

The enthusiastic responses to an open-ended and optional survey question were overwhelming. UC Center Sacramento alumni valued their time in the program and found that their participation made a positive difference in their career journey and career trajectory and wanted to share their successes. Many UC Center Sacramento survey respondents used their UC Center Sacramento experience as a springboard for the next step in their career journey. For some, this meant continuing a career in public service or public service in the Sacramento policy community. For others, this included pursuing graduate school upon graduation.

Respondents related that they would not be where they are today had it not been for UC Center Sacramento. They also wrote that participating in UC Center Sacramento helped to provide additional internship experience outside of UC Center Sacramento or assisted in preparing them to take advantage of prestigious postgraduation fellowship opportunities. Participating in UC Center Sacramento cemented their interest in pursuing a career in public service and returning to the Sacramento policy community beyond graduation.

Research Question 3: What Barriers to Participation and Enrollment do UC Center Sacramento Alumni Identify?

As part of my dissertation research, it was also important to understand the potential barriers to participation in UC Center Sacramento as it provides a valuable academic and career development experience for UC undergraduate students. Included within the UC Center Sacramento survey were a list of possible barriers to participation, including institutional and noninstitutional barriers. Students were asked to think about any students they knew as a UC undergraduate student who considered applying to UC Center Sacramento but decided not to apply and the factors that they believed influenced their decision to apply or not to apply. Survey respondents were able to make multiple selections and select all that applied (Table 15). The top three barriers to participation that UC Center Sacramento alumni survey respondents identified were unpaid internships, paying for housing at their home campus and in Sacramento, and concern with financial costs associated with participating in the program. These three top barriers are interlinked, as they suggest that the main barriers to participation in UC Center Sacramento are financial.

Table 15. *UCCS Survey Respondents: Student Barriers to UCCS Participation*

Barriers	<i>n</i>	%
Internship was unpaid	63	29
Paying for housing costs at home campus and in Sacramento	44	20
Concerned with financial costs associated with participating in the program	42	19
Finding housing in Sacramento	29	13
Loss of employment at home campus	12	5
Issues with course articulation (i.e., UCCS courses counting towards college, major, and/or minor requirements)	14	6
Negative impact on undergraduate time to degree	11	5
Other	6	3

Note. Based on 188 UC Center Sacramento survey respondents. For this survey question, respondents could select more than one response. Actual survey respondent numbers vary by category. Affirmative responses only are shown by category. UCCS = University of California Center Sacramento.

One potential barrier to participation that was examined in more depth is information about the program. A survey question asked how UC undergraduate students learned about UC Center Sacramento. In addition to the barriers identified by the survey participants, having access to information about UC Center Sacramento may be in and of itself a potential barrier to participation.

In Table 16, we see that among the full sample of survey participants (Column 1), the majority (52%) of UC Center Sacramento alumni applied to the program after hearing about UC Center Sacramento from a UC campus advisor, staff, or faculty member. Overall, respondents also heard about UC Center Sacramento through internship and career fairs at their home campus (13%) as well as through friends or classmates (13%). These data are critically important as UC Center Sacramento looks to expand UC student participation. It highlights the importance of outreach to UC campus staff and faculty, continued attendance by UC Center Sacramento staff members at internship and career fairs, and the continuation of hiring UC Center Sacramento alumni as UC Center Sacramento ambassadors at their home campus.

It is notable that not all UC Center Sacramento alumni heard about UC Center Sacramento through the same sources and that there was variation by ethnic groups. Latinx/Chicanx survey respondents heard about UC Center Sacramento from a UC advisor, staff, or faculty member to a similar degree as for the full sample (53%), but the share of Black/African American students learning about the center from these sources was much smaller (33%). Black/African American students were much more likely to have found out about UC Center Sacramento through an internship and career fair (33%) compared to the sample as a whole (13%). However, some caution is warranted in interpreting these results because only 9 respondents to this question were Black/African American. Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders were more likely than other ethnic groups to hear about UC Center Sacramento from social media (12% versus 6% for the overall sample). White/Caucasian, Black/African American, and Asian American and Pacific Islander groups were more likely to hear about UC Center Sacramento through a friend or classmate in comparison to other ethnicity groups.

Table 16. *How UCCS Alumni Heard About UCCS*

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Source	Full sample <i>M (SD)</i>	White/ Caucasian <i>M (SD)</i>	Latinx/ Chicanx <i>M (SD)</i>	Asian American/ Pacific Islander <i>M (SD)</i>	Multiracial/ multiethnic <i>M (SD)</i>	Other <i>M (SD)</i>	Black/ African American <i>M (SD)</i>
UC advisor/staff/faculty	0.52 (0.50)	0.48 (0.50)	0.53 (0.50)	0.55 (0.50)	0.41 (0.50)	0.38 (0.51)	0.33 (0.50)
Internship and career fair	0.13 (0.34)	0.11 (0.32)	0.12 (0.33)	0.17 (0.38)	0.15 (0.36)	0.08 (0.28)	0.33 (0.50)
Friend or classmate	0.13 (0.33)	0.21 (0.41)	0.08 (0.28)	0.19 (0.40)	0.15 (0.36)	0.08 (0.28)	0.22 (0.44)
UCCS	0.11 (0.31)	0.15 (0.36)	0.06 (0.24)	0.14 (0.35)	0.11 (0.32)	0.08 (0.28)	0.11 (0.33)
adviser/staff/faculty							
Social media	0.06 (0.24)	0.08 (0.27)	0.02 (0.14)	0.12 (0.33)	0.07 (0.27)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Campus info session	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Observations	188	62	49	42	27	13	9

Note. Variables represent means on a 1–5 Likert scale with 5 being *strongly agree*, 4 *somewhat agree*, 3 *neither agree nor disagree*, 2 *somewhat disagree*, and 1 *strongly disagree*. Based on 188 UCCS survey respondents. Actual survey respondent numbers vary by category. Affirmative responses only are shown by category. Ethnicity is self-reported and respondents could select multiple ethnicities. If multiple ethnicities were selected then this is reported as multiracial/multiethnic. Due to a low number of respondents for Pacific Islander, Pacific Islander is combined with Asian American in order to maintain anonymity and confidentiality. No Native American respondents to report. UCCS = University of California Center Sacramento.

In summary, based on an analysis of paper and online applications of matriculated students, the students who participated in UC Center Sacramento are diverse. Nearly two-thirds were female, 33% Latinx/Chicanx, 26% Asian American and Pacific Islander, and 25% White/Caucasian. Students also had economic need, with 41% receiving Pell grants. Additionally, 44% identified as first-generation college students, defined as having parents who did not receive a bachelor's degree or equivalent. The Qualtrics survey respondent profile was similarly diverse with 64% female, 29% White/Caucasian, 24% Chicanx/Latinx, and 23% Asian American and Pacific Islander. The Qualtrics survey respondent profile similarly had economic need with 68% receiving financial aid, 48% receiving a Pell Grant, and 41% identified as first-generation college students, defined as having parents who did not receive a bachelor's degree or equivalent.

UC Center Sacramento alumni rated the UC Center program highly on average and across all ethnicity groups with the exception of students who selected "other" race/ethnicity, for both their academic program and internship program. It is important to note that "other" had a low number of respondents and so results may not be representative. As part of the Qualtrics survey, UC Center Sacramento alumni identified barriers to participation and the top three were that the internship was unpaid, paying for housing costs at the home campus and in Sacramento, and concern with financial costs associated with participating in the program. These findings provide valuable insight into student experiences with the program.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Through matriculated student application data and Qualtrics survey data, my study addressed the following three questions:

1. Who participates in University of California Center Sacramento (UC Center Sacramento), in terms of demographics and socioeconomic characteristics?
2. How do UC Center Sacramento alumni rate their experiences in the UC Center Sacramento program? How does this vary by student race/ethnicity?
3. What barriers to participation and enrollment do UC Center Sacramento alumni identify?

With respect to my first research question, who participates in UC Center Sacramento, I analyzed applicant data from UC Center Sacramento matriculated students from the fall of 2010 through the winter of 2024. I combined data sets from both UC Center Sacramento paper applications and online applications from the fall of 2010 through the winter of 2024 to mirror the same period of attendance of the Qualtrics survey respondents. My analysis found that UC Center Sacramento serves a diverse student population. Matriculated UC Center Sacramento students were close to two-thirds female, 33% Chicanx/Latinx, 25% Asian American and Pacific Islander, and 25% Caucasian. Students also had economic need, with 82% receiving financial aid and 41% receiving Pell grants. Additionally, 44% identified as a first-generation college student, which was defined as having parents who did not receive a bachelor's degree or equivalent.

As for the second research question, looking at how UC Center Sacramento alumni rated their experiences in the UC Center Sacramento program, I asked UC Center Sacramento alumni about their experiences organized by three categories: academic experiences, internship

experiences, and professional development programming experiences. Respondents across all ethnicity groups demonstrated strong agreement that they encountered knowledgeable instructors at UC Center Sacramento. Program alumni shared that they gained valuable research skills, communication skills, and critical thinking skills through their UC Center Sacramento courses. However, the most positive responses were elicited through their responses about experiences with their internships. UC Center Sacramento alumni found their UC Center Sacramento internship experiences to be positive and valuable to their career across all ethnicity groups. They shared that they gained communication skills, gained confidence, expanded their professional network, received valuable mentorship, gained critical thinking skills, and gained research skills. These positive results were generally seen across all ethnicity groups, although the Other race/ethnicity category had notably less positive reported experiences. The Other category appears to be an outlier and generally the mean for each survey question was lower in comparison to other ethnicity groups. UC Center Sacramento alumni rated the UC Center Sacramento professional development experience less positively in comparison to the UC Center Sacramento academic and internship experiences. However, UC Center Sacramento alumni across all ethnicity groups shared resoundingly that they were overall very satisfied with their UC Center Sacramento experience.

The Qualtrics survey also included an optional open-ended question. An overwhelming number of survey respondents responded to the optional question, many with lengthy and detailed positive responses. Five themes emerged through the qualitative analysis and coding of the responses: the UC Center Sacramento experience was a pivotal part of their career journey; participating in UC Center Sacramento clarified future career and/or educational goals; UC Center Sacramento participation provided and/or enhanced skills for postgraduation

opportunities; the UC Center Sacramento experience provided an opportunity for networking and relationship building in the policy community; and participating in UC Center Sacramento provided mentorship and confidence. Additionally, 76% of UC Center Sacramento alumni shared that they were able to secure employment within 6 months of graduation from their University of California (UC) home campus, and 93% were currently employed or attending graduate or professional school. An impressive number of UC Center Sacramento alumni pursued graduate training, with 54% earning a master's degree, 29% earning a law degree (JD), and 8% earning a doctoral degree. A significant number of UC Center Sacramento alumni (55%) work in government or nonprofit sectors, filling a much-needed pipeline to careers in public service.

In the Qualtrics survey, UC Center Sacramento alumni were also asked about possible barriers to participation that may be encountered by students who may be interested in the program and don't apply. Respondents were able to select more than one response. The top three barriers to participation were that the internship was unpaid, concern about housing costs at their home campus and in Sacramento and concerned with the financial costs associated with participating in the program. In other words, the top three barriers were primarily financial, providing important insights to administrators looking to expand access to these programs.

It is useful to consider these findings in the context of Super's (1980) career development theory. Super writes about the life-career rainbow, decision points, and the five career developmental stages in an individual's lifetime. The five career developmental stages include the growth stage, exploration stage, establishment stage, maintenance stage, and decline stage. The exploration stage directly relates to the analysis and findings from my research. Participating in an internship-based experiential learning program like UC Center Sacramento directly helps

students during a critical point in their career journey. Students explore various career opportunities as well as build valuable skills and gain professional experience, allowing students who participate in programs like UC Center Sacramento to have hands-on experience that can help guide them to make informed decisions during this important time in life. Students' responses in the open-ended surveys speak to the utility of the UC Center Sacramento experience in providing them with important information about whether public service was a suitable career for them, and, if so, with connections to help them pursue those careers.

The findings from my research also closely corroborate with the literature in the field. For instance, research conducted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers in 2018 by Guarise and Kostenblatt found that participating in both paid and unpaid internships contributed positively to career development. Similarly, Galbraith and Mondal's 2020 study, using a public university that was part of the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education, found that the opportunity to do an internship and gain hands-on experience helped students build strong professional networks and assisted them in realizing that their choice of career was the right opportunity for them. In a 2022 report on "The Value of Career Services," VanDerziel showed a positive correlation between student utilization of career services, like resume reviews and mock interviews, and job offers. The results of my survey similarly reflect the positive findings that other researchers in the field have found when students participate in internship based experiential learning programs like UC Center Sacramento.

Limitations

My dissertation research is based on a case study of a single internship-based experiential learning program, UC Center Sacramento, which can be a limitation. As UC Center Sacramento is an internship-based experiential learning program that is part of a large system-wide public

research university system, the findings may not be generalizable to other higher education institutional settings. However, UC Center Sacramento is an internship-based experiential learning program for the largest public higher education system in the most populated state in the nation, making it an important case to study. Focusing on a single program allows for an in-depth review and analysis but nonetheless may have limited applicability to other settings.

UC Center Sacramento is a program in which students have to apply to be accepted and so experiences may not be as positive for students with a less active interest in public policy. Participating in a program like UC Center Sacramento would not necessarily have the same effects if those participating were not interested in applying or were dissuaded by barriers associated with participating in an internship-based experiential learning program. Experiences for these groups might have been different, either more positive or more negative. Survey respondents were also self-selected. The survey may have elicited responses from program alumni who were more positive (or negative) than the typical alumnus.

The sample size for the survey can also be seen as a limitation as I did not have active email addresses for all UC Center Sacramento program alumni. Additionally, the number of observations for both the Other ethnicity category and the Black/African American category was low in comparison to other ethnicities, so the means for these groups may have been more swayed by outlier observations compared to other groups. In the future, this same survey or a similar survey instrument could be sent to recent UC Center Sacramento alumni, as recent UC Center Sacramento cohorts are larger and more diverse in student representation.

Implications for Practice and Policy

My research focused on experiential learning within the UC system through a case study of UC Center Sacramento. UC Center Sacramento is a system-wide program that has dual

reporting to both the UC Office of the President and UC Davis. The primary audience for this research will be UC Center Sacramento stakeholders. This includes the provost and vice provost of academic affairs in the UC Office of the President and the provost of academic affairs at UC Davis since UC Center Sacramento has a reporting relationship to both offices. Additionally, this research will be of interest to the UC Center Sacramento Advisory Board, the UC Center Sacramento Faculty Council, the UC Center Sacramento Alumni Council, internship host sites, UC Center Sacramento's academic and administrative team, alumni of UC Center Sacramento, and current UC Center Sacramento students. Other key practitioners who would be interested in my work include campus administrators, faculty, and staff at each of the UC campuses and beyond engaged in student advising and career development.

The audience for this research should focus on the diverse student population that programs like UC Center Sacramento serves and the benefits to participating in an internship-based experiential learning program like UC Center Sacramento, and look at ways in which to expand the program so that additional students can take advantage of the opportunity. It is critically important for postsecondary students to be prepared to enter the workforce and seamlessly transition from life in college to life after college. In particular, it is important to address barriers to participation through increased funding for students that will provide meaningful support. In addition to increased funding for students, increased funds for UC Center Sacramento and programs like UC Center Sacramento will also need to be allocated in order to provide services because these programs are often labor intensive.

Beyond UC stakeholders, this research is salient to any UC or higher education entity that is itself an experiential learning program or works with experiential learning programs as well as any researchers who study experiential learning opportunities as a high-impact practice. In

particular, UC Center Sacramento aligns with Kuh's (2008) assessment of effective high-impact practices, which include practices that demand time and effort towards a purposeful task; place students in circumstances that connect them with faculty and peers; increase the likelihood that students will experience diversity through increased interactions with others; typically provide students with feedback about their performance that they can work on; and provide students the opportunity to integrate and apply knowledge in a different setting outside of the traditional classroom. Through its academic, internship, and professional development programming, UC Center Sacramento provides an effective high-impact opportunity that supports a career-ready workforce.

Ideally this research will provide the data and analysis needed for increased support for experiential learning activities throughout the UC system with a greater focus on workforce preparation. Through my research, internship-based experiential learning program as a high-impact practice can play a critical role in impacting a student's career journey and trajectory. Increased value on hands-on learning outside of the traditional classroom is critical as the UC system prepares their undergraduate students for life after graduation. A focus on addressing barriers to participating in experiential learning activities is also important. The literature on barriers to internship participation often focus on financial, social, cultural, and institutional factors (Hora et al., 2021). Similarly, my research findings show that the top three barriers identified by our UC Center Sacramento program alumni were primarily financial. Generally, the literature in this field recognizes the benefits of internship participation for all students, but particularly for students of color. As a result, programs, like UC Center Sacramento should be developed with intentionality (Kolb, 2017; Kuh, 2013) and with equity in mind (McNair et al., 2020), highlighting the need for increased student funding and support.

The UC Center Sacramento experience plays an important role in the lives of our UC undergraduate students as they are exploring and embarking on their careers, helping them make informed decisions at critical decision points (Super, 1980) as well as informing the exploration stage of their career development. During this stage, the professional development services provided by UC Center Sacramento can be critical as UC Center Sacramento alumni move from the career exploration phase as undergraduate students to engage in experimentation, self-discovery, and decision-making as young professionals.

Implications for Future Research

Prior to this research, UC Center Sacramento had not organized, collected, or analyzed data around demographics, the student experience, barriers to participation, and postgraduation outcomes. Although this research provided important data and analysis, further research should be done, looking at the experiences for respondents who indicated their race to be other and who had an experience that seemed to be less positive than other race groups. Additionally, although the open-ended optional Qualtrics survey question responses proved valuable, this research would benefit from more in-depth qualitative work including small focus groups and one-on-one interviews on how to improve and build upon UC Center Sacramento's academic, internship, and professional development programming.

Although future research is in order, this study adds to the experiential learning literature as a high-impact practice case study. In particular, I looked at student experiences across three aspects of the student experiential learning experience: academics, internships, and professional development opportunities. The creation of pathways into careers or academia through participation in experiential learning opportunities that engage and connect students while in

college to postgraduation opportunities can increase the connection between college attendance and career outcomes—receiving the necessary job preparation to succeed. UC Center Sacramento is part of the UC system, which is the largest public higher education system in the nation. This case study can be seen as an exemplary tool to inform development of internship programs to cultivate future leaders within our local communities, throughout the state, and across the nation.

REFERENCES

- Armijo, J., Gillum, N., & Adams, J. (2022). Latinx Internship Prepa: An experiential career readiness and preparation program for Latinx, first-generation undergraduate college students. *Experiential Learning & Teaching in Higher Education*, 5(1), Article 12.
- Bathmaker, A.-M., Ingram, N., & Waller, R. (2013). Higher education, social class and the mobilisation of capitals: Recognising and playing the game: Education and Social mobility. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 34(5–6), 723–743.
- Bhattacharya, K. (2017). *Fundamentals of qualitative research: A practical guide*. Routledge.
- Binder, J. F., Baguley, T., Crook, C., & Miller, F. (2015). The academic value of internships: Benefits across disciplines and student backgrounds. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 41, 73–82. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2014.12.001>
- Bradberry, L. A., & De Maio, J. (2019). Learning by doing: The long-term impact of experiential learning programs on student success. *Journal of Political Education*, 15 (1), 94–111.
- Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and education*. Macmillan Company.
- Finley, A. & McNair, T (2013). *Assessing underserved students' engagement in high-impact practices*. Association of American Colleges and Universities.
- Flaherty, C. (2021, April 5). *What employers want*. Inside Higher Ed. <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2021/04/06/aacu-survey-finds-employers-want-candidates-liberal-arts-skills-cite-preparedness>
- Galbraith, D. & Mondal, S. (2020). The potential power of internships and the impact on career preparation. *Research in Higher Education Journal*, 38, 1–9.
- Guarise, D. & Kostenblatt, J. (2018, September). *The impact of unpaid internships on career success of liberal arts graduates*. National Association of Colleges and Employers.
- Halper, L., Craft, C., & Shi, Y. (2020). Expanding the student employment literature: Investigating the practice of reflection in on-campus student employment. *Journal of College Student Development*, 61(4), 516–521.
- Herr, E. L., Cramer, S. H., & Niles, S. G. (2004). *Career guidance and counseling through the lifespan: Systematic approaches* (6th ed.). Allyn & Bacon.
- Holland, N. E. (2010). Postsecondary education preparation of traditionally underrepresented college students: A social capital perspective. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 3(2), 111–125. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0019249>
- Hora, M. (2022). Internships for all? Delivering on the promise of high impact practices. In J. Zilvinskis, J. Kinzie, J. Daday, K. O'Donnell, & C. Vande Zande (Eds.), *Delivering on the promise of high-impact practices: Research and models for achieving equity, fidelity, impact, and scale* (pp. 113–123). Stylus Publishing.
- Hora, M. T., Huerta, A., Gopal, A., & Wolfgram, M. (2021). *A review of the literature on internships for Latinx students at Hispanic-serving institutions: Toward a Latinx-serving internship experience* (WCER Working Paper No. 2021-2). University of Wisconsin–Madison, Wisconsin Center for Education Research

- Hora, M. T., Huerta, A., Gopal, A., & Wolfgram, M. (2021). A review of the literature on internships for Latinx students at Hispanic-serving institutions: Toward a Latinx-serving internship experience (WCER Working Paper No. 2021-2). University of Wisconsin–Madison, Wisconsin Center for Education Research.
- Kolb, A. Y. (2017). Experiential learning theory as a guide for experiential educators in higher education. *Experiential Learning and Teaching in Higher Education*, 1(1), Article 7.
- Kolb, A.Y., & Kolb, D. A. (2005). Learning styles and learning spaces: Enhancing experiential learning in higher education. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 4(2), 193–212.
- Kuh, G. (2008). *High-impact educational practices: What they are, who has access to them, and why they matter*. Association of American Colleges & Universities.
- Kuh, G. (2013). *Ensuring quality and taking high-impact practices to scale*. Association of American Colleges and Universities.
- Lake, E. (2021, November). A case study of black students’ perception of experiential learning at PWIs. *NACE Journal*, 10–22.
- Long, D. (2012). Theories and models of student development. In L. J. Hinchliffe & M. A. Wong (Eds.), *Environments for student growth and development: Librarians and student affairs in collaboration* (pp. 41–55). Association of College & Research Libraries.
- Looksharp. (2016). *State of millennial hiring report*. <http://www.looksharp.com>
- McNair, T. B., Bensimon, E. M., & Malcom-Piqueux, L. E. (2020). *From equity talk to equity walk: expanding practitioner knowledge for racial justice in higher education*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2019). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- National Association of Colleges and Employers. (2025). Career readiness program: Development and validation. https://www.nacweb.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/2025/career-readiness/nace-career-readiness-development-and-validation-december-2025.pdf?sfvrsn=1e53c2b6_3
- Parker, E., Kilgo, C., Ezell, J., & Pascarella, E. (2016). The differential effects of internship participation on end-of-fourth-year GPA by demographic and institutional characteristics. *Journal of College Student Development*, 57(1), 104–109.
- Perna, L. W. (2010). Conclusions and Recommendations for Policy, Practice, and Future Research. In L. W. Perna (Ed.), *Understanding the Working College Student* (1st ed., pp. 283–307). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003448495-18>
- Sass, D., Castro-Villarreal, F., Wilkerson, S., Guerra, N., & Sullivan, J. (2018). A structural model for predicting student retention. *The Review of Higher Education*, 42(1), 103–135.
- Super, D. E. (1957). *Scientific careers and vocational development theory*. Teachers College, Columbia University.
- Super, D. E. (1976). *Career education and the meanings of work* (Monographs on Career Education). Superintendent of Documents.

- Super, D. E. (1980). A life-span, life-space approach to career development. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 16(3), 282–298. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0001-8791\(80\)90056-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/0001-8791(80)90056-1)
- University of California Center Sacramento. (n.d.) *UC Center Sacramento*.
<http://uccs.ucdavis.edu>
- VanDerziel, S. (2022). The Value of Career Services. Report for the National Association of Colleges and Employers. November 28, 2022.
- Wolfgram, M. & Ahrens, V. (2022). One internship, two internships, three internships...more!: Exploring the culture of the multiple internship economy. *Journal of Education and Work*, 35(2), 139–153.
- Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications : design and methods*. (Sixth edition.). SAGE Publications, Inc.

Appendix A: University of California Center Sacramento Historical Timeline

It is important to acknowledge the history of University of California Center Sacramento (UC Center Sacramento) as it provides a foundation for understanding the research setting. This timeline is taken from a memo written by immediate past UC Center Sacramento director, Dr. Richard Kravitz.

2004: UC Center Sacramento is founded under University of California (UC) President Richard Atkinson and Director Gary Dymski (UC Riverside)

2008: UC Center Sacramento is temporarily closed during a UC fiscal crisis in 2008–2009

2009: UC Center Sacramento reopens under a Memorandum of Understanding between UC Office of the President and UC Davis

2009–2013: UC Center Sacramento is under the leadership of Director Robert Huckfeldt (UC Davis)

2013–2024: UC Center Sacramento is under the leadership of Director Richard Kravitz (UC Davis Health)

2014: UC Center Sacramento Strategic Report that describes a growth model for UC Center Sacramento that includes the following scenarios: baseline, baseline+, and baseline++

2014: University of California Chancellors and Vice Chancellors vote to increase the system-wide subsidy for UC Center Sacramento from \$246,000 to \$650,000 with the expectation that the center will grow to 125 students annually and include public programming

2014–2018: UC Center Sacramento enrollment exceeds expectations and grows to 180 students annually and public programming increases dramatically—meeting and surpassing the goals set forth in the 2014 strategic plan

2018–2019: UC Office of the President Provost Brown commissions the Huron Consulting Group to do a study of UC Center Sacramento’s current and future state

2019: Huron Report is issued with a positive assessment of UC Center Sacramento and a recommendation for additional growth tied with additional funding

2019: Private-public housing partnership signed with 19J

2020: COVID-19 pandemic hits and UC Center Sacramento is virtual for four consecutive quarters. 1130 K Street building in Sacramento is sold by UC Office of the President and a new building at 1115 11th Street in Sacramento is purchased by UC Center Sacramento

2023: UC Center Sacramento moves into its new building, the UC Student and Policy Center, at 1115 11th Street in Sacramento

Appendix B: Survey Questions

UCCS Program Evaluation

Start of Block: Default Question Block

As an alumnus of UC Center Sacramento (UCCS), you are being invited to join a program evaluation study. The purpose of this study is to learn about student experiences as a past participant of the program. If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to complete a survey. You will be asked questions about your student experience at UCCS, questions related to your time after graduation, and demographic questions. It will take about 12–15 minutes to complete the survey. There is no direct benefit to you from taking part in this study. We hope that this program evaluation will help support the continuation of academic student programs at UCCS and future UCCS program participants. The risks of this study are minimal. Some of the questions might make you feel uncomfortable or upset. You do not have to answer any of the questions you do not want to answer. As with all surveys, there is a chance that confidentiality could be compromised. However, responses will be collected anonymously and there is minimal risk of any of your answers being tied to you personally. In addition, data will be stored on password-protected computers. The data that we collect in this survey may be used to answer other questions or shared with other investigators. We will not ask for additional consent for the use or sharing of your data in other research. Survey data may be uploaded to a data repository such as the Open Science Framework for other researchers to access and use. Again, these data would not include personal or identifiable information about you. There is no compensation for participation in this study. Taking part in this program evaluation is completely voluntary. You are free to decline to take part in the project. You can decline to answer any questions and you can stop taking part in the project at any time. Whether or not you choose to take part, or answer any question, or stop taking part in the project, there will be no penalty to you or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you have any questions about this program evaluation, please feel free to contact the principal investigator, Cindy Simmons, at csimmons@ucdavis.edu. Additionally, if you have any questions about your rights or treatment as a participant in this program evaluation, please contact the UC Davis, Institutional Review Board by phone: (916) 703-9158 or by email: HS-IRBEducation@ucdavis.edu. If you agree to take part in the research, please print a copy of this page to keep for future reference, then click on the “Accept” button below.

- Accept (1)
- Do Not Accept (2)

Skip To: End of Survey If As an alumnus of UC Center Sacramento (UCCS), you are being invited to join a program evaluation... = Do Not Accept

Are you a UC Center Sacramento (UCCS) alum and over the age of 18 years old?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Skip To: End of Survey If Are you a UC Center Sacramento (UCCS) alum and over the age of 18 years old? = No

How did you hear about the UCCS program (mark all that apply)?

- UC Campus Advisor/Staff/Faculty (1)
- UCCS Advisor/Staff/Faculty (2)
- Friend or classmate (3)
- Social media (4)
- Website (5)
- Campus info session (6)
- Internship and Career Fair (7)
- Printed advertisement (8)
- Other (9)

I participated in UCCS because (please mark all that apply):

- Academic courses offered (1)
- Required capstone research project (2)
- Opportunities for professional work experience (3)
- Networking opportunities (4)
- Career exploration (5)
- Gain job skills (6)
- Work in the Sacramento policy community (7)
- Personalized internship placement process (8)

For the next question, please think about any students you knew as a UC undergraduate student who considered applying but decided not to. What factors are you aware of that you believe influenced their decision not to apply to the program (select all that apply)?

- Internship was unpaid (1)
- Paying for housing costs at home campus and in Sacramento (2)
- Finding housing in Sacramento (3)
- Concerned with financial costs associated with participating in the program (4)
- Loss of employment at home campus (5)
- Issues with course articulation (i.e., UCCS courses counting towards college, major, and/or minor requirements) (6)
- Negative impact on undergraduate time to degree (7)
- Other (8)
- I did not know of any students (9)

UC Center Sacramento Experience: Academic

We are curious to know about your experience with the academic component of the UCCS program. The following questions are on a scale of 1 through 5:

1 Strongly Disagree

2 Somewhat Disagree

3 Neither Agree or Disagree

4 Somewhat Agree

5 Strongly Agree

How true are each of the following:

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Not Applicable
	1	2	3	4	5	
I found instructors to be knowledgeable						
I gained critical thinking skills						
I gained research skills						
I gained communication skills						
I found the courses to be useful in my career						

UC Center Sacramento Experience: Internship

We are curious to know about your experience with the internship component of the UCCS program. The following questions are on a scale of 1 through 5:

1 Strongly Disagree

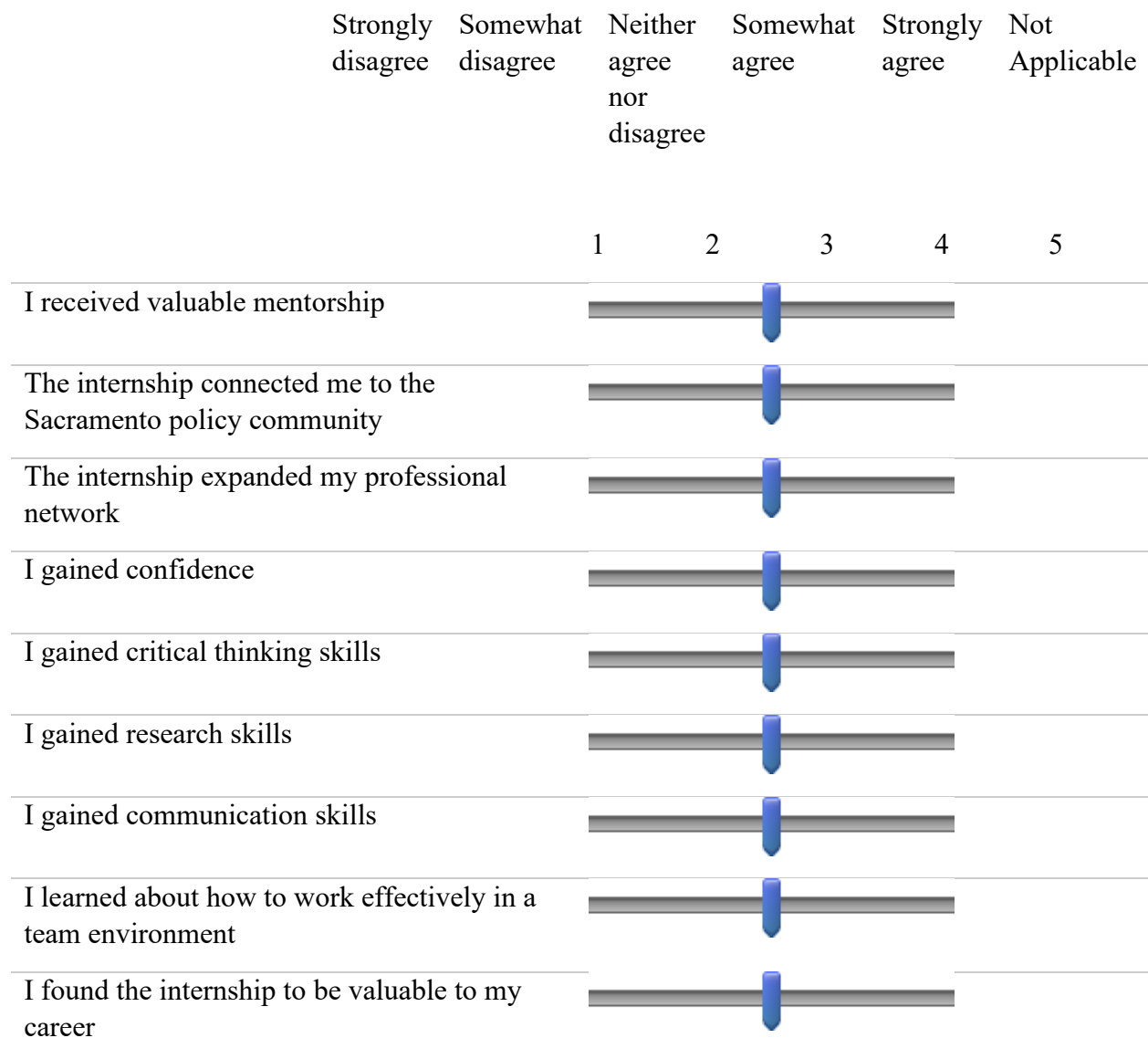
2 Somewhat Disagree

3 Neither Agree or Disagree

4 Somewhat Agree

5 Strongly Agree

How true are each of the following:



Was your UCCS internship:

- In Person (1)
- Virtual (2)
- Hybrid (3)

UC Center Sacramento Experience: Professional Development

We are curious to know about your experience with the professional development component of the UCCS program. This includes Professional Support Services (mock interviews, resume reviews, and internship placement services), Extended Curriculum (workshops on networking, how to get a state job, applying to graduate school) and general UCCS Student Support Services. The following questions are on a scale of 1 through 5:

1 Strongly Disagree

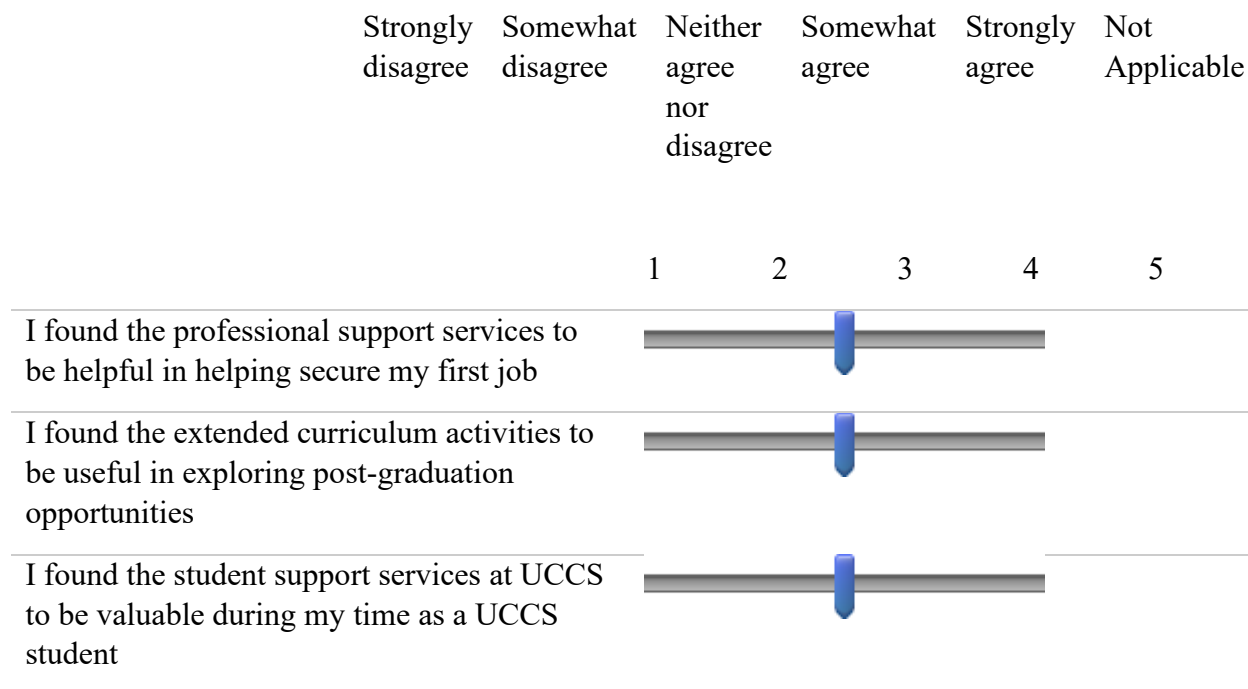
2 Somewhat Disagree

3 Neither Agree or Disagree

4 Somewhat Agree

5 Strongly Agree

How true are each of the following:



The UCCS professional development experience at UCCS helped launch my career	
The UCCS professional development experience has contributed positively to my career satisfaction	

Overall, how satisfied are you with your UCCS experience? The following question is on a scale of 1 through 5:

1 Extremely Dissatisfied

2 Somewhat Dissatisfied

3 Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied

4 Somewhat Satisfied

5 Extremely Satisfied

Extremely dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Extremely satisfied
---------------------------	--------------------------	---	-----------------------	------------------------

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

Overall, how satisfied were you with your UCCS experience? ()



Would you recommend the UCCS program to UC undergraduate students?

- Yes (1)
- Maybe (2)
- No (3)

Please describe the ways in which UCCS impacted your career trajectory.

Is there anything that did not meet your expectations?

We are interested in learning what students did after graduation. Would you say that your main activity in the first year after graduation was:

- Employment (1)
- Graduate or Professional School (2)
- Other (3)
- Not applicable (i.e., currently completing my UC undergraduate degree) (4)

How long did it take to secure your first job (part-time or full-time) post-graduation from your UC undergraduate institution?

- Secured employment prior to graduation (1)
- Within 3 months of graduation (2)
- 3 to 6 months after graduation (3)
- 7 to 12 months after graduation (4)
- More than 12 months after graduation (5)
- I did not seek employment post-graduation (6)
- Not applicable (i.e., currently completing my UC undergraduate degree) (7)

What employment sector was your first job in?

- For Profit Company or Organization (1)
- Not for Profit (2)
- Government (City, County, State Agency) (3)
- Legislative, Executive, or Judicial Branch at the State or Federal Level (4)
- Other (5)
- Not applicable (i.e., currently completing my UC undergraduate degree) (6)

If currently employed, what employment sector is your current job in?

- For Profit Company or Organization (1)
- Not for Profit (2)
- Government (City, County, State Agency) (3)
- Legislative, Executive, or Judicial Branch at the State or Federal Level (4)
- Other (5)
- Not applicable (i.e., currently completing my UC undergraduate degree) (6)

Are you currently receiving or have received graduate training in the following areas? Please select all that apply.

- I am not attending nor have I attended graduate school (1)
- Masters Degree (MPP, MPA, MA, MPH, EdM) (2)
- Doctoral Degree (PhD, MD, DVM, DDS, EdD) (3)
- Law degree (JD) (4)
- Other graduate or professional school (5)

What ethnicity do you identify with (you can select more than one)?

- Black/African American (1)
- Asian American (2)
- Chicanx/Latinx (3)
- Native American (4)
- Pacific Islander (5)
- White/Caucasian (6)
- Other (7)

Are you a first-generation college student (i.e., neither parent received a bachelor's degree or equivalent)?

- Yes (1)

- No (2)

What year did you receive your UC undergraduate degree?

- 2024 (1)
- 2023 (2)
- 2022 (3)
- 2021 (4)
- 2020 (5)
- 2019 (6)
- 2018 (7)
- 2017 (8)
- 2016 (9)
- 2015 (10)
- 2014 (11)
- 2013 (12)
- 2012 (13)
- 2011 (14)
- 2010 (15)
- 2009 or earlier (16)
- Have not yet graduated (17)

What year did you participate in UCCS?

- 2024 (1)
- 2023 (2)
- 2022 (3)
- 2021 (4)

- 2020 (5)
- 2019 (6)
- 2018 (7)
- 2017 (8)
- 2016 (9)
- 2015 (10)
- 2014 (11)
- 2013 (12)
- 2012 (13)
- 2011 (14)
- 2010 (15)
- 2009 or earlier (16)

How many years did it take you to complete your UC undergraduate degree (including time spent at a college prior to transferring to the UC)?

- Less than 4 years (1)
- at least 4 years but less than 5 years (2)
- at least 5 years but less than 6 years (3)
- at least 6 years but less than 7 years (4)
- 7 years or more (5)

Which UC undergraduate institution did you graduate from?

- UC Berkeley (1)
- UC Merced (2)
- UC Davis (3)
- UC Irvine (4)
- UC Los Angeles (UCLA) (5)
- UC Riverside (6)

- UC San Diego (7)
- UC Santa Barbara (8)
- UC Santa Cruz (9)

Which gender do you identify as?

- Male (1)
- Female (2)
- Non-binary/third gender (3)
- Decline to state (4)

At any time while you were a UC undergraduate student, did you file a FAFSA and receive financial aid, including loans, during your time as a UC undergraduate student?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Uncertain or do not recall (3)

If you filed a FAFSA and received financial aid during your time as a UC undergraduate student, did you receive a Pell Grant?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Uncertain or do not recall (3)

End of Block: Default Question Block