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This report describes the characteristics and post-UC Merced educational enrollments of High Unit Leavers - defined as students who left UC Merced with 90 or more completed units (i.e., Senior class standing). We investigated Frosh from the 2005-2014 entering cohorts and found that the vast majority of High-Unit Leavers chose to enroll at a community college rather than transfer to a 4-year institution, and most did not complete a degree or certificate after leaving UC Merced.

Background

This report investigates students who attained Senior class standing (i.e., completed 90 or more units), but left UC Merced without obtaining a degree – we refer to this group as High Unit Leavers. From the 2005-2014 entering frosh cohorts, a total of 392 students left UC Merced with 90 or more units and no degree. This group constituted 10% of all students who left the university from these cohorts.

To understand why students left the university after reaching Senior standing (as opposed to completing their degree), we compared academic and demographic characteristics for the high unit leavers and the students who completed their degrees from the 2005-2014 entering frosh cohorts. We used data from the National Student Clearinghouse to investigate the destinations, majors, and degrees earned by high unit leavers.

How common are High Unit Leavers?

Of all students from the 2005-2014 entering frosh cohorts that did not complete a UC Merced degree, half (50%) left with under 30 units completed (see Chart 1). Only 10% of leavers left with 90 or more units. Of all students who reached 90 units, 5% left, while 95% graduated. For the cohorts in this analysis, approximately 39 students per cohort left with 90 or more units; had these students graduated, this would have lifted our most recent 6-year graduation rate (for the fall 2012 cohort) from 66.0% to 68.8%.

Chart 1: Only 10% of leavers have 90 or more units.

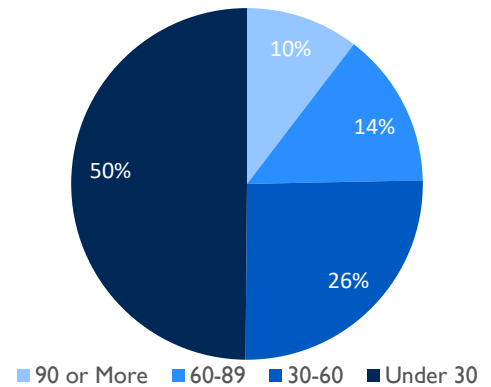
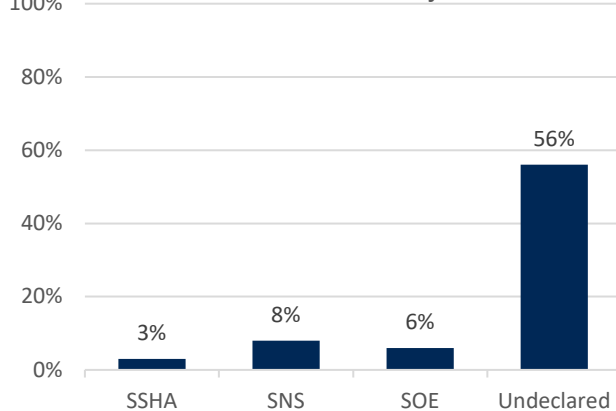


Chart 2: Percent of High Unit Leavers by School of Last Major



Academic Characteristics

We compared the proportion of high unit leavers to students who graduated by the school of first major and academic standing during the most recent academic term to investigate possible associations between high unit leaving and academic characteristics.

School Students in the School of Social Sciences, Humanities, and Arts (SSHA) were significantly¹ less likely to be High Unit Leavers (3%, 133 students) compared to students in the School of Engineering (SOE; 6%, 69 students), School of Natural Sciences (SNS; 8%, 176 students), or Undeclared (56%, 14 students), as shown in Chart 2. No difference was observed between SOE and SNS students. Undeclared students were also significantly¹ more likely than students in SSHA, SOE, or SNS to be high unit leavers (56%, 14 students) (note that the students who were

Background and Destinations of High Unit Leavers

Undeclared in the most recent academic term that graduated academic term that graduated did so in majors within SSHA).

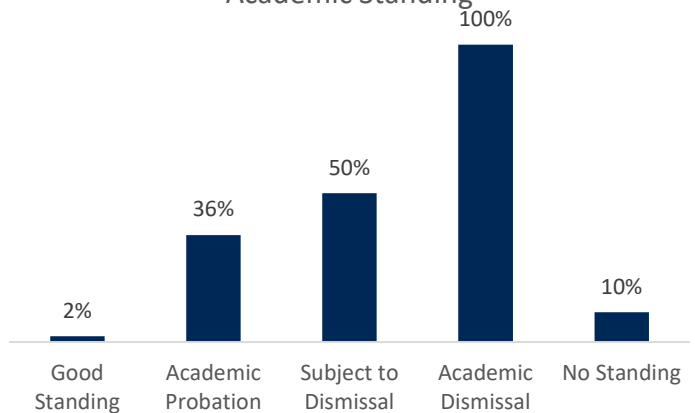
Academic Standing Students in [good standing](#) in the last enrolled term were significantly¹ less likely to be high unit leavers (2%, 146 students), compared to students on academic probation (36%, 148 students), or subject to dismissal (50%, 11 students), academic dismissal (100%, 67 students), or no standing (10%, 20 students). Students on academic dismissal were significantly¹ more likely to be high unit leavers compared to students in all other standings. Students with no standing were significantly¹ more likely to be high unit leavers than students in good standing, but less likely than students in all other standings. Students who were on academic probation or subject to dismissal were equally likely to be high unit leavers.

Grade Point Average High unit leavers had a significantly⁴ lower average GPA in their last term at UC Merced when compared to students who graduated (2.36 vs 2.99).

Course Repeats High unit leavers reenrolled in courses significantly⁴ more often than students who graduated, with more than double the number of repeats. High unit leavers reenrolled in courses an average of 4.6 times, while students who graduated reenrolled in courses 1.8 times. The number of unique courses repeated showed a similar pattern, with high unit leavers repeating significantly⁴ more unique courses; high unit leavers repeated a mean of 4.0 courses, while students who graduated repeated a mean of 1.6 courses.

Major changes There was no significant difference⁴ in mean major changes or school changes (while at UC Merced) between high unit leavers and students who graduated.

Chart 3: Proportion of High Unit Leavers by Academic Standing



Demographic Characteristics

To determine possible associations between demographic characteristics and rates of high unit leaving, we compared the proportion of high unit leavers to graduated students by gender, first generation status, ethnicity, and Pell Grant eligibility status.

Gender Men were significantly² more likely to be high unit leavers than Women (6% vs 4% became high unit leavers as opposed to completing their degree at UC Merced) (not pictured). Though the difference is statistically significant, this may not be practically meaningful – it was a difference of about 4 students per cohort.

First Generation Status³ There was no significant difference² between first-generation and non- first-generation students in the likelihood of being a high unit leaver, with about 5% of each group becoming high unit leavers (not pictured).

Pell Grant Eligibility Status. There was no significant² association between Pell Grant eligibility status and the likelihood of being a high unit leaver, with 5% of each group becoming high unit leavers (not pictured).

Ethnicity Underrepresented Minority (URM) students (e.g. those who were Hispanic, African American, or American Indian) were significantly² more likely to be high unit leavers than Non- URM students, 6% vs 5% (not pictured). This difference may not be practically meaningful, as it was a difference of about 2 students per cohort.

Destinations of High Unit Leavers

We examined the educational destinations of the high unit leavers, locating recent enrollments for 41% (162) of the 392 high unit leavers in the National Student Clearinghouse database. We were unable to obtain records for the other 230 students, which mean that they either did not enroll in higher education, or they enrolled at an institution that does not report to the National Student Clearinghouse (e.g. foreign institutions). While students took a variety of paths, we found that surprisingly, California Community Colleges were the most popular (62%, 101 students) destination of known enrollments.

2-year institutions We found that high unit leavers who re-enrolled most often (65%) did so at a 2-year institution (see Chart 4). 62% (101 students) opted to attend a California Community College after leaving UC Merced, 1% (2) attended an Out of State 2-year Public institution, and 1% (2) chose a For-Profit. The most popular individual 2-year institution was Merced college, at 26 enrollments.

4-year institutions 35% of the high unit leavers who re-enrolled were most recently enrolled at a 4-year institution, with 15% (24 students) opting to attend a California State Institution, and 4% (7) choosing to remain in the UC system. The other 15% (26) chose to enroll in Out of State and/or private institutions (See Chart 4); the most popular private institution was San Francisco State University, at 6 enrollments.

Geographic Region 60% (97) of the high unit leavers who re-enrolled did so in the same geographic region of California from which they originated (not pictured).

Majors Major information was provided for 59% (96) of the 162 enrollment records in the National Student Clearinghouse database. The most popular fields for high unit leavers to re-enroll in were Biological and Biomedical Sciences at 10% (16 enrollments), Health Professions at 9% (15), Business, Management, Marketing and related, 9% (14), and Liberal Arts, 6% (10). The most common individual major was Biological Sciences at 9%, (14 enrollments) with all other majors at enrollments of 5 or fewer. Many enrollments (42%) had unknown majors; however, of the known majors, 66% of students did choose to enroll in majors not offered at UC Merced.

Chart 4: Destinations of High Unit Leavers

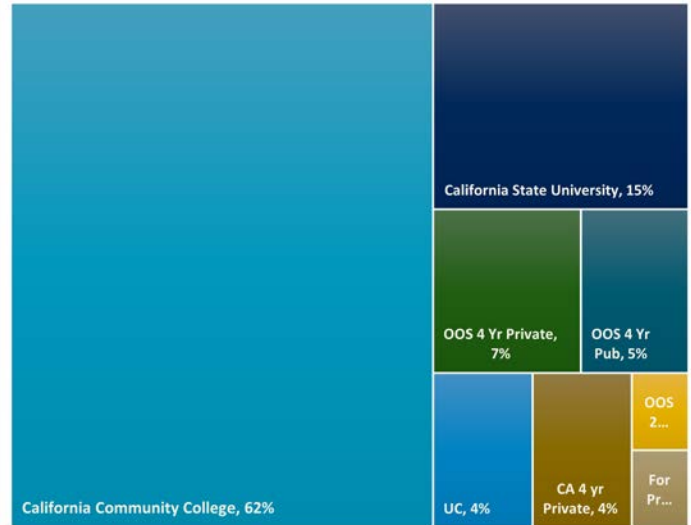
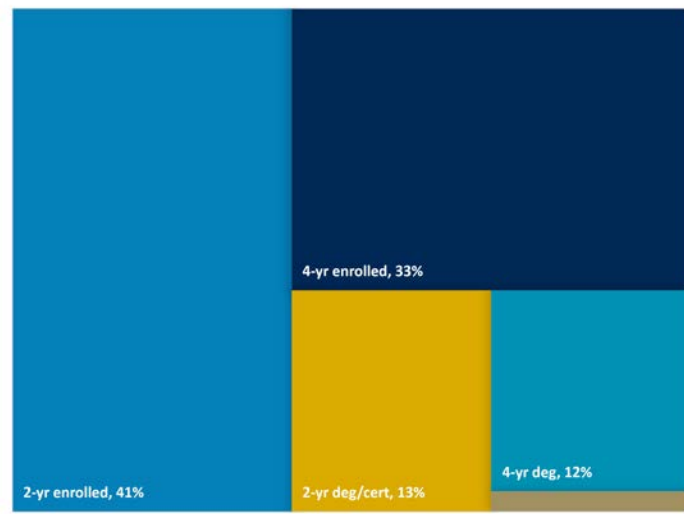


Chart 5: Current Educational Status



Current Educational Status and Degrees

Current educational status as of Spring 2019 is shown in Chart 5. Current status differs from most recent enrollments, as students may have either completed their degrees or left higher education. Most high unit leavers are of unknown or not enrolled status (78%, 307 students), with a small minority (16%, 63 students) currently enrolled in higher education and even fewer (6%, 22 students) completing any degree. The largest proportion (41%, or 35) of the current statuses were enrollments at 2-year institutions, with Merced College the most common institution (6 enrollments). A third of the known statuses were enrollments at 4-year institutions (33%, or 28 students). The most common 4-year institution of choice was CSU Stanislaus (3 enrollments).

Conclusion

In this report, we found that leaving the university with 90 or more units was not common; this group of 392 students constituted 10% of all students who have left UC Merced from the 2005-2014 entering frosh cohorts and represented only 5% of students who had attained 90 or more units. On average, approximately 39 students from each entering cohort have been high-unit leavers. High unit Undeclared students were most likely to leave, though they made up only 14 of the high unit leavers.

High unit leavers tended to leave while not in good academic standing, they had lower GPAs than their peers who graduated, and they repeated more coursework.

Most high unit leavers who re-enrolled in higher education returned to their home geographic region of California, and preferred to re-enroll at California Community Colleges, though the majority did not continue their education. The majority of known majors did not overlap with UC Merced academic offerings, suggesting that high unit leavers were choosing new academic paths. A small minority of this group maintains current enrollment in higher education, and an even smaller group has obtained a degree or credential.

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ENDNOTES

1. Based on Chi-Square analysis, Pairwise Comparisons of Column Proportions with Bonferroni Correction. $p < .05$ was our threshold for statistical significance.
2. Based on Chi-Square analysis, $p < .05$.
3. First Generation is defined as Neither parent having earned a 4-year degree.
4. Calculated via a One-way Analysis of Variance, $p < .05$.