

Advancing Your Bruin's Career Success: The Power of Data

As each student's collegiate experience is unique and individualized, so is their life after graduation. The University of California has acquired these data to help students and families understand what students do and where students go after graduation.



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Being a parent myself, I probably share many of the same concerns and expectations you have about your own son's or daughter's college experience. For example, will her major lead to a well-paid job? Will he be able to repay those student loans? These are important and legitimate questions, and the UCLA Career Center is hard at work to help you and your child answer them. One way we're approaching this is by conducting our annual *First Destination Survey* and publishing it on our website.

At its heart, the *First Destination Survey* is about asking graduating students, specifically at the bachelor's-degree level, "What are you doing after graduation?" The final results provide information intended to help everyone—certainly parents—gain a more accurate, more detailed and generally clearer picture of where UCLA students go after graduation and what they are doing.

What is the *First Destination Survey*?

Before discussing the specifics of the survey, it's helpful to have some context for why the *First Destination Survey* is important and why the data collected are beginning to take center stage in the discussion of the value of higher education in America. If you heard or read President Obama's 2013 State of the Union Address, you may recall a reference to an effort called the College Scorecard. Similarly, there has also been talk in the news about pending legislation called The Student Right to Know Before You Go Act, which is being promoted by Sens. Marco Rubio and Ron Wyden. Scorecard and Know Before You Go are similar initiatives in that they are intended to provide college applicants, and their parents, with more information about the "value" of a degree from a particular school or program.

With the costs of higher education escalating far faster than the rate of inflation (a general rule of thumb is that college tuition doubles every 10 years), college applicants and their parents are becoming much more vocal about questioning the return on investment of a college degree. Many of us in higher education have significant concerns about attempts to narrowly quantify the value of college education in strictly monetary terms (for example, basing success solely on salary reported six months after graduation). However, we cannot deny that both the government and the general public are hungry for data pertaining to the post-graduation destinations of college graduates.

Education researchers in the University of California system are doing our best to stay ahead of the demand curve. Thus, we already have established our “post-graduation-information” data collection and reporting processes before government legislation mandates it. Indeed, we are hopeful that our efforts may be seen as a model for the rest of the country. For example, UCLA and Berkeley are currently working in a unique collaborative effort to use the same survey delivery and reporting systems. We envision a day when students who are applying to several University of California schools (and their parents) can have access to robust and accurate information pertaining to life after securing *any* UC degree so that they can conduct a genuinely helpful side-by-side comparison.

But rather than just complying with government bureaucracy or collaborating across University of California campuses, the *UCLA First Destination Survey* is about providing complete and accurate data that can inform the career development decisions of all Bruins, meaning your sons and daughters.

Although the *First Destination Survey* is intentionally concise, requiring only about five minutes for a graduating student to complete, it provides a wealth of information about the post-graduation circumstances of Bruins. To quickly touch on the methodology, the *First Destination Survey* is web-based. Invitations are emailed to all graduating undergraduates approximately four weeks prior to the end of each quarter (UCLA has a significant number of students graduating in fall and winter quarters as well as spring.) Students who complete the survey are removed from the distribution list, while students who do not reply are sent multiple follow-up invitations, some many months after graduation. Unfortunately, campus research standards (overseen by the UCLA Institutional Review Boards) prohibit us from making our survey mandatory.

We consider this data to be of tremendous importance to our students and the university and hope one day that prohibition will be lifted. Despite that, our response rate and the resulting data are quite significant thanks to the graduating students and new graduates who voluntarily complete the questionnaire.

It should be clarified that although there are several other efforts within the UCLA campus to ascertain the post-graduation plans of certain populations, the Career Center's *First Destination Survey* is the only endeavor focused on reporting the *actual* post-graduation status of *all* UCLA undergraduates regardless of school, department or major. We try to ask every graduating student whether his or her career or graduate school plans are firmly in place, a work-in-progress or still a mystery. No matter what the answer is or how much detail they have, we ask that they complete the survey as best they can so we can gather as much data as possible about exactly what it is that our Bruins are doing after graduation. In addition, encouraging new graduates to update their survey responses for six months after graduating ensures an even more accurate account of their true “first destination.”

Some of the specific topics explored by the *First Destination Survey*:

- Average salary by job title and academic department/major
- The employers most commonly cited as hiring UCLA graduates
- Geographic destinations of students after graduation
- The most commonly cited graduate/professional schools where Bruins continue their education
- Admissions statistics for Bruins going on to medical school and law school
- The average number of internships each student had while enrolled as an undergraduate
- The average volume of volunteer work and public service in which each student engaged while at UCLA

The *First Destination Survey* and the Career Center

As valuable as the *First Destination Survey* data are, no single resource can guarantee fruitful career development. Although a wonderful tool for comparing majors and salaries and finding popular employers

and graduate schools, the *First Destination Survey* report still needs to be used in conjunction with all of the other essential career development offerings and services made available through the Career Center. It is critical for students to understand that the role of the Career Center is to provide sound, time-tested career education rather than simply serving as a “placement agency.” The old saying “Give a person a fish and they will eat for a day; teach a person to fish and they will eat for a lifetime” is an accurate assessment of how the UCLA Career Center approaches your child’s career education. Of course, there is no shortage of amazing organizations clamoring to hire UCLA graduates right away, and we do facilitate the direct connection between employers and students (meaning, we hand out some fish) through our robust BruinView™ platform. But our foremost concern is preparing our students to achieve their career goals now and well into their futures, even when they are years and miles away from UCLA. Not only should your sons and daughters be leveraging resources like the *First Destination Survey*, BruinView™, and our in-house career lab/library (one of the largest in the nation with over 2,500 titles), they should also be using resources like: our internship, externship and international opportunities available through The Zone, large-scale and boutique career fairs, our credit-bearing career development course, Education 150, a host of workshops, and some of the best one-on-one career counseling in the country. The number of resources and links that could be included are simply too numerous to list here, but rest assured, if your child visits us regularly from the time they enter UCLA, we can state with confidence that he or she will have no problem finding a fulfilling and rewarding career.

How You Can Get Involved in the *First Destination Survey* Process

To discuss all of the great ways parents can be a force for good in their child’s career development is beyond the scope of this article. However, specific to this discussion, there are a couple of things you can do to help your sons and daughters have access to the best career development information possible. If your child is just now a prospective student, ask *destination type* questions when you go on tours and speak with admission representatives so the university will know that this information and these types of data are important to you. On the other end, strongly encourage them to complete the *First Destination Survey* when they graduate. Not only will it benefit them by providing a robust dataset that accurately reflects their career landscapes, it will also help current and future Bruins clarify their own career paths and provide UCLA with some of the best post-graduation-trend data in the country. It cannot be stressed enough that all parents (as well as grandparents, siblings, aunts and uncles, etc.) can play an important supportive role in an individual’s career development process. For further reading on how you can positively influence a young Bruin’s career development, please take a moment to check out these HOTlinks listed specifically for parents at the UCLA Career Center website.

Of course, if you haven’t yet, please check out UCLA’s *First Destination Survey*!

Parent & Family Matters Archive