UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Graduate, Undergraduate and Equity Affairs

PROCESS AND METHODOLOGY FOR CALCULATING UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT BUDGETS, 2026-27

PROCESS

The undergraduate Standard Methodology Budgets (referred to here as "student budgets") are the product of a UC system wide, standardized process that establishes 3 budget types (Commuter, On Campus, Off Campus) for each UC campus. The budgets are calculated using student survey data from the Undergraduate Cost of Attendance Survey (COAS) (inflation-adjusted in years in between surveys), on-campus housing rates, government housing and food expense data, and campus fee information. The student budgets are vetted through the Education Financing Model Steering Committee, comprised of campus enrollment management, financial aid, student affairs, and budget leadership, as well as student and faculty representatives; each year the committee reviews the budgets and votes on any modifications to the methodology.

SETTING COSTS BY ITEM

HOUSING

Commuter and Off Campus housing expenses are calculated using COAS data and supplemented with information collected from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). For Off Campus housing, the methodology eliminates answers from students who report sharing a bedroom with more than one other person, assuming that such a decision is indicative of economic duress. Additionally, the HUD average for zip codes near campus is used as a rent "floor" and replaces student reported amounts that are lower than the HUD average.

On Campus housing rates are collected directly from the campus housing offices. Figures used in the budgets are a weighted average of all campus residential options excluding family housing.

GROCERIES, MEALS OUT, AND SNACKS

For students who do not have a campus meal plan, grocery expenses are calculated using COAS data, supplemented with information collected from the US Department of Agriculture (USDA). The USDA provides monthly amounts for thrifty, moderate, and liberal grocery expenses for meals prepared at home. This version of the budgets uses the thrifty cost as a floor by replacing the COAS reported with the USDA amount if the USDA amount is higher than the COAS amount.

For all students, regardless of whether or not they have a campus meal plan, an additional allowance for snacks and meals not prepared at home is built into the budgets using data collected from COAS.

PERSONAL

The "Personal" cost category of the student budgets is calculated using COAS data and includes items and services like clothing, personal care, recreation, memberships, and healthcare costs not covered by insurance. The calculated averages include only positive responses in subcategories for Personal allowances (i.e., cost in subcategories reflect the average for those reporting the expense).

TRANSPORTATION

Transportation costs are calculated using COAS data in which students report their primary modes of transportation to school and work and all related expenses. This includes public transportation, tolls, parking, gas, car registration, insurance, and bike or vehicle maintenance. To comport with federal regulations, UC's student budgets do not factor in the cost associated with the purchase or monthly payments for owning a vehicle.

BOOKS AND SUPPLIES

Cost figures for books and educational supplies come from a combination of COAS data and fee revenue amounts collected from the campuses. The subcategories for books, computer software, computer hardware, tablets, and other educational supplies are calculated using cost amounts reported by students on the survey. Only positive responses are used, meaning averages in those categories reflect the average for those reporting the expense. Course materials and lab fees are calculated using the per capita average of total fee revenues reported by campuses.

TUITION, FEES AND UC STUDENT HEALTH INSURANCE PROGRAM PREMIUMS

Direct charges for systemwide mandatory, as well as campus-based, tuition and fees are included in the expense budgets. For students enrolled in a University health insurance program, the premium is included in the student expense budget.

OTHER RESOURCES

The latest student expense budgets are posted here.

UCOP will conduct a Graduate Cost of Attendance Survey with a report to be released in late 2026, which campuses can use to set student expense budgets. There is no systemwide methodology.

The Cost of Attendance Working Group made several recommendations for improving how the University sets the cost of attendance in their final report in 2017.

How UC students pay for the Net Cost of Attendance is available for undergraduates and graduate students.