

Highlights of the UC Graduate Student Experience Survey Results on Career Development

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA Institutional Research and Academic Planning

Graduate student career development 2025 UCGSES

On-track degree completion

2025 survey results showed improvements to students' reported sense of being on track for an on-time graduation

Career support and preparation

2025 survey results showed improvements to students' reported career support and preparation

Career outlook

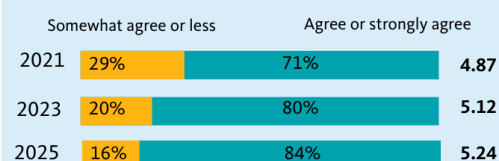
2025 survey results showed students felt a greater sense of direction for their career, but felt less upbeat regarding their career prospects



On track to an on time degree completion

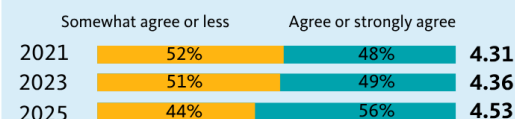
This change over time may reflect the fading impacts of COVID19, when many graduate students had to abandon field study programs, had decreased access to laboratories, and faced other obstacles to timely degree completion. The first administration of UCGSES was in 2021, so there is no comparative data prior to the pandemic.

I'm on track to complete my degree program on time



Career Outlook

I have a sense of direction for my career post-graduation



While students report a greater sense of direction and better support and preparation, responses to 'I'm upbeat about my post-graduation career prospects' increased slightly from 2021 to 2023 before falling to meet 2021 levels in 2025. This conflicting trend may be driven by poorer job market prospects in 2025 compared to previous years



Career Support and Preparation

Students reported improved career support in 2025 for three items:

- My graduate program offers enough career exploration resources
- My graduate program has been preparing me for the career I want post-graduation
- How satisfied are you with the following aspects of your program?
 - The career support I receive in my program

Unsurprisingly, given the improved career support, students reported feeling more prepared for the job search process in 2025

I'm prepared for the job search process



Intersections with career and artificial intelligence

24%



of survey respondents reported using AI to assist with career preparation (e.g., resume writing, interview preparation)

59%



of survey respondents reported having an at least 'good' preparation level for using generative AI in their career

Graduate student career development

The following analyses are based on responses from the University of California Graduate Student Experience Survey (UCGSES). The survey has been administered three times in 2021, 2023, and 2025. The survey solicits graduate and professional students' opinions on a broad range of topics including but not limited to post graduate career development, academic and co-curricular experiences, instruction and training, advising, basic needs, financial support, and student services. The survey is administered by Institutional Research and Academic Planning at the UC Office of the President (UCOP) in collaboration with Graduate, Undergraduate and Equity Affairs at UCOP and Graduate Division and Institutional Research campus survey coordinators from each of the UC campuses. About 60,000 enrolled masters, doctoral, and professional students at all ten UC campuses were invited to participate in the survey during spring 2025. Over 13,000 students responded to the survey, with over 12,000 of those students completing the survey (22 percent response rate).

Scope of the report

In advance of Provost Newman's UC Systemwide Congress focusing on Labor Market Destinations of Recent College Grads in October 2025, this report was compiled to help inform related conversations, initiatives, and policies. Focusing on graduate student's self-reported survey data, the report examines students' perceptions of being on track towards completing their degree on time, career support and preparation, career outlook, and intersections with career and artificial intelligence. When appropriate and available, year by year comparisons are provided as well as result breakdowns by campus, discipline, and degree type.

Findings

Overall trends point toward improvements in graduate student career development since 2021, which may at least partially be related to the diminishing negative impacts of COVID19 for more recent cohorts.

On track to an on time degree completion

Results show an improvement from 2021 to 2025 in student perceptions of being on track to an on time degree completion across all UC campuses, degree types, and disciplines. This likely is at least partially a reflection of the disruption caused to students during the COVID19 pandemic. Many students faced challenges such as cancelled field research, limited laboratory access, and other disruptions which resulted in longer times to degree completion. As time passed, restrictions lifted, and newer cohorts did not face the same challenges as earlier cohorts.

Students who 'agree' or 'strongly agree' to being on track to an on time degree completion by campus

Categories	2021	2023	2025
Berkeley	73%	82%	87%
Davis	68%	77%	81%
Irvine	74%	81%	87%
Merced	59%	68%	76%
Riverside	65%	76%	80%
San Diego	66%	76%	84%
San Francisco	76%	88%	90%

Categories	2021	2023	2025
Santa Barbara	61%	71%	76%
Santa Cruz	63%	74%	77%
UCLA	78%	83%	85%
Systemwide	71%	80%	84%

Students who agree or strongly agree to being on track to an on time degree completion by degree type

Categories	2021	2023	2025
Academic Master	78%	85%	90%
Academic Doctor	59%	69%	74%
Professional Master	89%	92%	94%
Professional Doctor	67%	83%	87%
Professional Practice	93%	95%	95%
Systemwide	71%	80%	84%

Students who agree or strongly agree to being on track to an on time degree completion by discipline

Categories	2021	2023	2025
Arts	73%	76%	83%
Engineering/Computer Sciences	67%	77%	83%
Health Prof/Clinical Sciences	86%	90%	91%
Humanities	64%	70%	70%
Life Sciences	58%	72%	79%
Physical Sciences/Math	62%	71%	78%
Professional Fields	84%	90%	91%
Social Sciences/Psychology	66%	75%	79%
Other/Unknown	71%	77%	87%
Systemwide	71%	80%	84%

Career support and preparation

From 2021 to 2025, students reported that their graduate program had improved career exploration resources, better prepared them for the career they want post-graduation, and students generally reported greater satisfaction with the career support they received in their program. Improvements in these areas were not necessarily linear, showing a dip in mean scores from 2021 to 2023 before rising to their highest scores in 2025.

Mean student evaluations of programmatic support for career development from 2021 to 2025, on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) – 6 (strongly agree)

Categories	2021	2023	2025
My graduate program offers enough career exploration resources	4.00	3.98	4.14
My graduate program has been preparing me for the career I want post-graduation	4.15	4.13	4.39
How satisfied are you with the following aspects of your program? - The career support I receive in my program	4.33	4.24	4.35

Students reported year-over-year improvements when reporting their sense of preparedness for the job search process. This increase was seen across all campuses (with the exception of Santa Cruz from 2023 to 2025), most degree types, and most disciplines. To some extent, this may be related to the greater reported satisfaction of their graduate program's support, though it likely is not the only explanation, especially considering the dip in satisfaction in 2023 for some programmatic support measures while student's perceptions of their own preparedness for the job search increased each year.

Students who 'agree' or 'strongly agree' to being prepared for the job search process by campus

Categories	2021	2023	2025
Berkeley	35%	40%	45%
Davis	33%	37%	38%
Irvine	34%	36%	41%
Merced	28%	30%	34%
Riverside	32%	37%	41%
San Diego	31%	35%	40%
San Francisco	33%	34%	46%
Santa Barbara	22%	27%	30%
Santa Cruz	23%	27%	25%
UCLA	38%	39%	42%
Systemwide	33%	37%	40%

Students who 'agree' or 'strongly agree' to being prepared for the job search process by degree type

Categories	2021	2023	2025
Academic Master	40%	42%	43%
Academic Doctor	24%	27%	28%
Professional Master	49%	51%	53%
Professional Doctor	43%	43%	41%
Professional Practice	48%	47%	62%
Systemwide	33%	37%	40%

Students who 'agree' or 'strongly agree' to being prepared for the job search process by discipline

Categories	2021	2023	2025
Arts	22%	24%	28%
Engineering/Computer Sciences	39%	42%	46%
Health Prof/Clinical Sciences	43%	42%	51%
Humanities	18%	22%	25%
Life Sciences	25%	28%	27%
Physical Sciences/Math	25%	28%	32%
Professional Fields	46%	49%	53%
Social Sciences/Psychology	22%	25%	27%
Other/Unknown	33%	32%	36%
Systemwide	33%	37%	40%

Career outlook

Students reported an increasing sense of direction for their career post-graduation from 2021 to 2025 across all UC campuses, degree types, and disciplines.

Students who 'agree' or 'strongly agree' to having a sense of direction for their career post-graduation by campus

Categories	2021	2023	2025
Berkeley	48%	52%	59%
Davis	47%	50%	55%
Irvine	48%	49%	58%
Merced	44%	48%	51%
Riverside	46%	51%	58%
San Diego	46%	46%	53%
San Francisco	48%	54%	66%
Santa Barbara	40%	38%	45%
Santa Cruz	44%	45%	46%
UCLA	51%	50%	58%
Systemwide	48%	49%	56%

Students who 'agree' or 'strongly agree' to having a sense of direction for their career post-graduation by degree type

Categories	2021	2023	2025
Academic Master	47%	48%	52%
Academic Doctor	42%	43%	47%
Professional Master	56%	58%	63%
Professional Doctor	48%	56%	59%
Professional Practice	64%	64%	80%
Systemwide	48%	49%	56%

Students who 'agree' or 'strongly agree' to having a sense of direction for their career post-graduation by discipline

Categories	2021	2023	2025
Arts	43%	36%	46%
Engineering/Computer Sciences	49%	52%	57%
Health Prof/Clinical Sciences	56%	57%	71%
Humanities	41%	40%	45%
Life Sciences	41%	42%	46%
Physical Sciences/Math	40%	42%	46%
Professional Fields	56%	58%	64%
Social Sciences/Psychology	42%	44%	52%
Other/Unknown	50%	45%	50%
Systemwide	48%	49%	56%

While students generally report greater preparation for the job search and increased sense of direction for their career from 2021 to 2025, students' reports of being upbeat about their post-graduation career prospects did not follow the same pattern. When examining the mean scores (on a scale of 1-6), 2021 shows the lowest score (4.16) while rising slightly in 2023 (4.23) before falling again to baseline levels in 2025 (4.16). When examining only the two most positive response options ('agree' and 'strongly agree'), the pattern looks slightly different at the system level, where scores rise slightly from 2021 to 2023, with no change from 2023 to 2025. Year-by-year patterns differ across the UC campuses, degree type, and discipline with a substantial decline for UC Davis and Santa Cruz, academic and professional doctoral students, and students in life science fields, when examining these summed top two categories.

Students who 'agree' or 'strongly agree' to being upbeat about their post-graduation career prospects by campus

Categories	2021	2023	2025
Berkeley	46%	49%	49%
Davis	45%	50%	44%
Irvine	42%	45%	47%
Merced	37%	44%	41%
Riverside	40%	46%	44%
San Diego	43%	42%	44%
San Francisco	50%	51%	60%
Santa Barbara	34%	36%	34%
Santa Cruz	31%	36%	31%
UCLA	46%	47%	49%
Systemwide	43%	46%	46%

Students who 'agree' or 'strongly agree' to being upbeat about their post-graduation career prospects by degree type

Categories	2021	2023	2025
Academic Master	45%	44%	45%
Academic Doctor	36%	40%	35%
Professional Master	55%	55%	55%

Categories	2021	2023	2025
Professional Doctor	56%	64%	52%
Professional Practice	61%	61%	74%
Systemwide	43%	46%	46%

Students who 'agree' or 'strongly agree' to being upbeat about their post-graduation career prospects by discipline

Categories	2021	2023	2025
Arts	23%	28%	29%
Engineering/Computer Sciences	50%	49%	49%
Health Prof/Clinical Sciences	58%	57%	65%
Humanities	19%	24%	23%
Life Sciences	40%	44%	34%
Physical Sciences/Math	40%	42%	39%
Professional Fields	52%	53%	56%
Social Sciences/Psychology	29%	35%	33%
Other/Unknown	39%	41%	39%
Systemwide	43%	46%	46%

Intersections with career and artificial intelligence

Artificial intelligence promises to play a major role in future workplaces, and therefore student familiarity with generative AI tools may be an important indicator for their future career success. When students were asked if they had ever used generative AI tools to 'assist with career preparation (e.g., resume writing, interview preparation)', 24% of graduate students, systemwide, responded affirmatively while the remaining claimed to have not used generative AI for this purpose. However, this generally low usage for career preparation does not necessarily indicate students' perceived preparation to use generative AI in their career. Most students feel they have at least a 'good' level of preparation to use generative AI in their career across campuses, degree types, and disciplines, with only a couple exceptions (Social Sciences/Psychology and Humanities students were the only groups that generally felt more unprepared than prepared).

Generative AI usage and level of preparedness at it relates to one's career by campus

Categories	Used generative AI for career preparation (Yes)	At least 'good' level of preparation to use generative AI in one's career
Berkeley	25%	62%
Davis	20%	52%
Irvine	26%	64%
Merced	20%	57%
Riverside	27%	60%
San Diego	25%	56%
San Francisco	21%	56%
Santa Barbara	21%	51%
Santa Cruz	17%	50%

Categories	Used generative AI for career preparation (Yes)	At least 'good' level of preparation to use generative AI in one's career
UCLA	24%	57%
Systemwide	24%	59%

Generative AI usage and level of preparedness at it relates to one's career by degree type

Categories	Used generative AI for career preparation (Yes)	At least 'good' level of preparation to use generative AI in one's career
Academic Master	32%	68%
Academic Doctor	15%	50%
Professional Master	36%	72%
Professional Doctor	16%	55%
Professional Practice	19%	54%
Systemwide	24%	59%

Generative AI usage and level of preparedness at it relates to one's career by discipline

Categories	Used generative AI for career preparation (Yes)	At least 'good' level of preparation to use generative AI in one's career
Arts	15%	50%
Engineering/Computer Sciences	30%	75%
Health Prof/Clinical Sciences	19%	54%
Humanities	8%	33%
Life Sciences	16%	50%
Physical Sciences/Math	17%	53%
Professional Fields	33%	65%
Social Sciences/Psychology	18%	47%
Other/Unknown	31%	62%
Systemwide	24%	59%