

Memo on Survey of Summer Sessions Participants and Non-participants: Advertising, Reasons for Participating and Financial Aid

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Key Findings and Implications:

- 1) Summer Sessions (SS) seems to have identified some effective ways to reach students through the campus “broadcast system” of mass emails and web postings. There are a number of other methods of outreach that seem to reach few students; some of these methods require very little in the way to resources (like Instagram) while others may represent places where resources could be better allocated (like paid advertising in the Press Enterprise).
- 2) Most students who took summer courses indicated that they made this decision for themselves and, further, that they wanted to focus on one (or a few) classes or had other proactive academic motivations (like wanting to graduate early). Many also indicated that the courses they wanted were full or not offered in fall, winter or spring. This suggests working with departments and colleges to identifying such courses, and highlighting the academic advantages of participation for students, may be effective strategies to increase summer enrollments. About 45% of participants stated that their decision to participate, or how many units to take, was sensitive to the requirement to carry 12 units to qualify for financial aid.
- 3) Among those who did not participate in SS, many indicated that teaching assistants, faculty and financial aid staff played a role in making that decision. Making sure these groups have accurate and up-to-date information about SS could play a role in bringing more students to participate. About one-third of students who did not take summer courses pointed to the 12 unit minimum for financial aid as a barrier; separately, 15% said that the financial aid policies were confusing. Many non-participants also indicated they had no reason to take summer classes.
- 4) Students who responded to the survey- among both SS participants and non-participants- have higher GPAs. Only UCR students still enrolled in the following fall had the opportunity to participate. This limits the generalizability of findings to all undergraduate students.

Participation:

In December of 2014, the Office of Evaluation and Assessment conducted an online survey of students to investigate: (1) how students learned about Summer Sessions (SS) at UCR; (2) the reasons they chose to take summer courses; and (3) related issues, including financial aid.

Two slightly different versions of the survey were created, one for SS participants and one for non-participants. Three of the five questions on each survey were identical and the other two questions were worded appropriately for participant and non-participants (“did” or “did not” participate) and offered a relevant set of answers. Ultimately 1,547 SS participants responded, out of 5,858 total participants for a response rate of 26%. Among non-participants, 2,932 responded out of a total of 11,326 students who did not participate for a response rate of 21% among non-participants.

Basic demographics for respondents are shown in Appendix One. Among both participants and non-participants respondents had higher GPAs than non-respondents. Survey respondents are likely to be the kind of more conscientious student who earn higher grades. There are no noteworthy differences between non-participant respondents and non-respondents. Among participants, however, respondents are more likely to be sophomores and juniors; seniors- who are likely taking just one or a few courses needed to graduate- responded at a somewhat lower rate. It is important to note, for both groups, that the survey took place several months after they made the decision to participate or not. The passage of time could have affected respondents’ recollections and limited our ability to reach students who left the institution (perhaps due to academic difficulties or graduation).

Advertising:

Similar percentages of participants and non-participants reported having encountered SS marketing in most of the media formats offered as choices. This suggests that those who do not participate in SS are probably about as aware of the existence of SS as those who did participate. (See Table 1.)

About one in three respondents- among both participants and non-participants- reported having seen an email from SS, from R’Side, seen a posting on R’Web and on a poster somewhere on campus. (Multiple choices were possible, so percentages sum to over 100%.)

For over half of the choices offered (17 of 26), less than 5% of respondents reported having encountered SS advertising in that way. The types of advertising in these categories are diverse. For example, the ad in the LA Times was the single least selected answer and one of the larger expenditures by SS on advertising; this probably represents an area where resources could be redirected. Others types of media, like Instagram, are very low cost and have potential for targeted outreach; even if they reach just a few students the cost to benefit ratio here could still be favorable.

Influencers:

For those who did take summer courses, almost all of them- 84%- say they made this decision for themselves. Academic advisors, friends and parents are the only other potential influences that participants mention with any frequency. (See Table 2.)

While about one quarter of non-participants claim they made the decision to participate or not for themselves, teaching assistants are mentioned slightly more often than that. Many non-participants also pointed to professors and financial aid advisors as influencing their decision.

These four categories were mentioned more often as influencers by non-participants than by participants.

(Although respondents were allowed to make more than one choice on this item, the pattern of responses from the subset of respondents who chose just one (65% of the total) looks essentially the same as when all choices from all respondents are included, as in Table 2. (Analysis the subset of student who made only one choice is not shown.))

Devices:

Participants and non-participants gave strikingly different answers to the question about what kinds of devices- phones or traditional computers- they use to look at classes being offered over the summer. (See Table 3.) For participants, by far the most common answer was computers and very few said they used phones; for non-participants the order was reversed (although there were not very large differences between the frequency of each answer). One plausible explanation is that to really identify which courses are being offered in a serious way (say, based on outstanding requirements for one's major) requires a computer while a phone is suitable for ambivalent "browsing."

Reasons:

The item about reasons to participate in SS gave participants and non-participants different sets of answers. (As shown in Tables 4A and 4B.)

For those who did not participate in SS (Table 4A), most mentioned that taking classes over the summer was too expensive (38%). About half as many (21%) said they were unsure about financial aid and at least a few (14%) also said that they found financial aid policies confusing. Students were allowed to choose more than one answer, and about a quarter (27%) of non-participants indicated that they were unsure about financial aid, found it confusing or both. (Analysis not shown.) This indicates that costs and understanding financial aid policies may be a barrier to participation for at least some students. Non-participants also mentioned having no reason to take summer courses (31%), living too far from campus (27%) and the need to work (16%). Some non-participants also indicated that the classes they were interested in were not offered (12%) or that the classes they were interested in were full (4%), although both reasons were selected relatively infrequently.

For those that did participate (Table 4B), the desire to concentrate on one or a few classes was most frequently named (42%). About a third mentioned that the courses they wanted or needed were full during fall, winter or spring. Several choices that seem to mark a clear academic orientation (wanting to improve grades, wanting to graduate early, smaller class sizes and access to instructors) were each mentioned by a fair number of students. The least commonly selected reason for participation was that SS was affordable.

It seems those who did participate largely understood the advantages of doing so in academic terms. Many of those who did not participate pointed to issues not directly connected to their status as a student (things like distance and cost, although financial aid policies were also important). One strategy to increase student interest in SS may be to frame participation in terms of being a productive and successful student.

Financial Aid:

The item about how financial aid effected participation in SS gave participants and non-participants different sets of answers. (As shown in Tables 5A and 5B.)

About one in three respondents among both participants and nonparticipants responded that money did not affect their decision. There was a group of participants who indicated that they were really only interested in taking one course and that financial aid did not affect this. Taken together, then, just over half of participants indicated in one way or another that their decision to participate was not greatly influenced by finances or access to financial aid. However, many of the remaining participants indicated that the 12-unit threshold caused them to take more units than they otherwise would have.

Most non-participants also indicated that money or financed did not impact their decision to participate. One in three indicated that the 12-unit threshold prevented them from taking SS. This suggests that a sizable minority of non-participants decisions may also be sensitive to financial aid policy.

Participants by Class Level:

Appendix Two presents data on all five questions broken down by class level for participants only. While there was a large total number of respondents, when they are broken down by class level and then by the several response categories some cells contain relatively few respondents. Because of this care should be taken in assigning meaning to differences between any two cells. However, even in this light there are few differences worth pointing out:

-The importance of parents in deciding to take summer courses declines steady from freshmen, through sophomore and junior, to senior respondents. There is also an increase in respondents saying classes were not offered as one moves from freshmen to senior.

-On the other side of the coin, those who report having not seen any SS advertising are distributed across class level in a way very similar to the campus as whole, suggested that it is not just freshmen who are new to UCR that have not seen promotional material for SS.

Table 1: If you have seen advertising for SS, where was it?

	SS Participants		SS Non-Participants	
	Percent ¹	Number	Percent ²	Number
An Email from SS	33.81%	523	31.34%	919
On R'Web	32.64%	505	36.19%	1061
Poster	31.67%	490	33.87%	993
An Email from R'Side	30.06%	465	34.41%	1009
UCR Homepage	22.62%	350	23.33%	684
An Ad in the Highlander	11.64%	180	13.57%	398
UCR Main Calendar	8.47%	131	9.86%	289
Postcard	8.27%	128	11.66%	342
Facebook	5.62%	87	6.45%	189
At an event on campus	4.72%	73	8.66%	254
On the UCR Housing Website	4.20%	65	4.50%	132
Branded Beverage Sleeve	3.30%	51	1.77%	52
Branded Pen	3.17%	49	3.79%	111
Branded Bookmark	3.04%	47	3.92%	115
Campus Circle	2.78%	43	4.26%	125
Table by the Bell Tower	2.78%	43	5.32%	156
On video screen on campus	2.71%	42	4.06%	119
Handout at the HOSS	2.71%	42	1.43%	42
Branded Tote bag	2.46%	38	2.86%	84
On Instagram	2.07%	32	1.77%	52
Short video produced by SS	1.49%	23	1.88%	55
Branded Post-its	1.23%	19	1.50%	44
An Ad in the Press Enterprise	0.58%	9	1.16%	34
During movie previews at UV	0.58%	9	1.16%	34
Twitter	0.52%	8	1.09%	32
An Ad in LA Times	0.32%	5	0.78%	23
I have, but do not remember where	12.67%	196	11.66%	342
Not sure if I have seen or not	7.11%	110	6.38%	187
Have Not Seen Any Advertising	15.90%	246	17.26%	506

Notes:

1) More than one answer possible, percent calculated out of 1,547 surveyed participants

2) More than one answer possible, percent calculated out of 2,932 surveyed non-participants

Table 2: Who helped you decide whether or not to enroll in SS?

	SS Participants		SS Non-Participants	
	Percent ¹	Number	Percent ²	Number
Myself	83.97%	1299	25.10%	736
Academic advisor	21.98%	340	14.36%	421
Friends	19.07%	295	9.31%	273
Parents	16.55%	256	13.92%	408
Financial Advisor	3.23%	50	11.66%	342
Professor	2.84%	44	12.93%	379
Staff	2.46%	38	13.30%	390
Teaching Assistant	2.00%	31	27.25%	799

Notes:

1) More than one answer possible, percent calculated out of 1,547 surveyed participants

2) More than one answer possible, percent calculated out of 2,932 surveyed non-participants

Table 3: When looking for classes being offered in the summer quarter, how do you do this?

	SS Participants		SS Non-Participants	
	Percent	Number	Percent	Number
Computer	68.41%	1033	33.92%	964
Both devices about equally	26.62%	402	24.00%	682
Phone	4.97%	75	42.08%	1196
	100.00%	1510	100.00%	2842

Table 4A: Which of the following influenced your decision TO TAKE summer courses at UCR? (SS Participants)

	Percent ¹	Number
Concentrate on one (or a few) classes at a time	41.82%	647
F/W/S classes were full	33.35%	516
The time of day was convenient	26.05%	403
I wanted to graduate early	24.05%	372
I live close to campus year round	21.40%	331
Make up for low grades in F/W/S	21.27%	329
Access to instructor	20.10%	311
Class sizes were smaller	19.59%	303
F/W/S classes were not offered	18.81%	291
SS were affordable	17.84%	276

Notes:

1) More than one answer possible, percent calculated out of 1,547 surveyed participants

Table 4B: Which of the following influenced your decision NOT to take summer courses at UCR? (Non-Participants)

	Percent ¹	Number
The cost of summer courses was too great	38.17%	1119
I had no reason to take courses	30.59%	897
I live too far from campus	27.25%	799
I was unsure of financial aid	21.28%	624
I was unsure how to sign up	16.41%	481
I had to work	16.37%	480
I found financial aid confusing	14.80%	434
The time of day was inconvenient	12.45%	365
The courses I wanted were not offered	11.66%	342
I did not know about SS at UCR	10.57%	310
The pace seemed to fast	9.75%	286
The courses I wanted were full	4.47%	131

Notes:

1) More than one answer possible, percent calculated out of 2,932 surveyed participants

Table 5A: How did financial aid affect your decision TO TAKE summer courses at UCR? (Participants)		
	Percent	Number
I took 12 units to qualify for financial aid, but did not really want to take this many units	36.24%	536
Money did not affect my decision	35.56%	526
I just "needed" one class and financial aid did not affect that	18.32%	271
Even with financial aid, I could not afford 12 units and took fewer	9.87%	146
	100.00%	1479

Table 5B: How did financial aid affect your decision NOT to take summer courses at UCR? (Non-Participants)		
	Percent	Number
Money did not affect my decision	37.96%	779
The need to take 12 units prevented me from taking SS	32.21%	661
Even with financial aid, I could not afford to take SS	29.82%	612
	100.00%	2052

Appendix One

Table A6: Demographics				
	SS Participants		SS Non-Participants	
Total	5,858		14,458	
Respondents	1,547		2,932	
Response Rate	26%		21%	
	Participant Respondent	Non-participant non-respondent	Non-participant respondent	Non-participant non-respondent
	1,547	4,311	2,932	11,326
Cumulative GPA	2.90	2.79	2.96	2.86
SAT Math	561	564	567	564
SAT Verbal	514	517	532	530
SAT Writing	526	526	539	535
Freshmen	11.96%	17.44%	34.71%	32.19%
Sophomore	22.04%	15.73%	22.28%	22.74%
Junior	32.77%	24.12%	22.99%	23.23%
Senior	33.23%	42.70%	20.02%	21.78%
CHASS	44.93%	45.58%	51.66%	58.49%
CNAS	27.54%	19.30%	30.44%	25.60%
BCoE	12.86%	10.81%	13.36%	11.50%
SoBA	6.01%	7.10%	4.54%	4.41%
SS Admin	8.66%	17.21%	-	-

Notes:

- 1) Only those individuals highlighted in light and lighter blue took part in the survey.
- 2) Bold indicates significant differences between responders and non-responders in groups. For averages, a t-test was conducted and for categorical variables a chi-square test; in both cases significance is defined as $p < 0.05$, two tailed, test.

Appendix Two

Table 7: If you have seen advertising for SS, where was it?

	Freshmen		Sophomores		Juniors		Seniors	
	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number
Email from SS	36.22%	67	36.88%	187	36.88%	187	29.96%	154
Poster	25.95%	48	33.14%	168	33.14%	168	30.74%	158
R'Web	31.89%	59	33.14%	168	33.14%	168	32.88%	169
An Email from R'side	35.14%	65	30.97%	157	30.97%	157	28.40%	146
UCR Homepage	32.43%	60	22.68%	115	22.68%	115	21.01%	108
An Ad in the Highlander	9.19%	17	12.82%	65	12.82%	65	11.87%	61
UCR Main Calendar	8.65%	16	8.88%	45	8.88%	45	8.95%	46
Postcard	17.30%	32	7.10%	36	7.10%	36	5.25%	27
Facebook	6.49%	12	6.11%	31	6.11%	31	5.25%	27
At an Event on Campus	8.65%	16	4.14%	21	4.14%	21	3.50%	18
Housing Website	8.11%	15	3.75%	19	3.75%	19	2.53%	13
Branded Beverage Sleeve	2.16%	4	3.35%	17	3.35%	17	3.31%	17
Handouts at the HOSS	2.70%	5	2.96%	15	2.96%	15	2.72%	14
Branded Tote bag	3.24%	6	2.76%	14	2.76%	14	1.95%	10
On Instagram	1.08%	2	2.37%	12	2.37%	12	2.14%	11
Branded Pen	5.41%	10	2.37%	12	2.37%	12	2.92%	15
Branded Bookmark	3.24%	6	2.17%	11	2.17%	11	2.33%	12
Campus Circle	5.95%	11	1.97%	10	1.97%	10	1.36%	7
Video Screen on Campus	3.24%	6	1.97%	10	1.97%	10	2.53%	13
Online Video	1.62%	3	1.78%	9	1.78%	9	1.36%	7
Table by the Bell Tower	1.08%	2	1.78%	9	1.78%	9	4.09%	21
Branded Post-its	1.62%	3	1.38%	7	1.38%	7	0.39%	2
An Ad in the Press Enterprise	0.54%	1	0.99%	5	0.99%	5	0.58%	3
During Movie Previews at UV	1.62%	3	0.59%	3	0.59%	3	0.58%	3
Twitter	1.08%	2	0.59%	3	0.59%	3	0.39%	2
An Ad in the LA Times	1.08%	2	0.20%	1	0.20%	1	0.39%	2
I have, but don't remember where	11.89%	22	14.60%	74	14.60%	74	11.67%	60
Not sure if I have seen or not	4.32%	8	6.71%	34	6.71%	34	8.17%	42
Have not seen any advertising	12.43%	23	15.78%	80	15.78%	80	16.34%	84

Notes:

- 1) More than one answer possible, percent calculated out of 185 freshman participants.
- 2) More than one answer possible, percent calculated out of 341 sophomore participants.
- 3) More than one answer possible, percent calculated out of 507 junior participants.
- 4) More than one answer possible, percent calculated out of 514 senior participants.

Table 8: Who Helped you Decide Whether or Not to Enroll in SS?

	Freshman		Sophomores		Juniors		Seniors	
	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number
Myself	77.30%	143	82.99%	283	84.42%	428	86.58%	445
Academic Advisor	17.84%	33	24.05%	82	22.49%	114	21.60%	111
Friends	19.46%	36	25.22%	86	19.53%	99	14.40%	74
Parents	27.57%	51	20.53%	70	15.58%	79	10.89%	56
Financial Aid Advisor	4.86%	9	2.35%	8	4.73%	24	1.75%	9
Professor	2.70%	5	2.93%	10	3.55%	18	2.14%	11
Teaching Assistant	3.24%	6	0.88%	3	2.37%	12	1.95%	10
Staff	6.49%	12	1.76%	6	2.17%	11	1.75%	9

Notes:

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- 2) More than one answer possible, percent calculated out of 341 sophomore participants.
- 3) More than one answer possible, percent calculated out of 507 junior participants.
- 4) More than one answer possible, percent calculated out of 514 senior participants.

Table 9: When looking for classes being offered in the summer quarter, how do you do this?

	Freshman		Sophomores		Juniors		Seniors	
	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number
Both devices about equally	20.88%	38	26.28%	87	28.40%	140	27.18%	137
Phone	8.24%	15	4.83%	16	4.06%	20	4.76%	24
Computer	70.88%	129	68.88%	228	67.55%	333	68.06%	343
	100%	182	100%	331	100%	493	100%	504

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- Notes:
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 - 3) More than one answer possible, percent calculated out of 507 junior participants.
 - 4) More than one answer possible, percent calculated out of 514 senior participants.
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Table A10: Which of the Following your decision to take summer courses at UCR?

	Freshman		Sophomores		Juniors		Seniors	
	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number
Concentrate on one (or a few) classes	42.70%	79	46.33%	158	43.79%	222	36.58%	188
F/W/S classes were full	24.86%	46	34.02%	116	39.64%	201	29.77%	153
The time of day was convenient	23.24%	43	24.34%	83	28.60%	145	25.68%	132
I love close to campus year round	15.14%	28	20.23%	69	25.44%	129	20.43%	105
I wanted to graduate early	21.08%	39	24.34%	83	20.51%	104	28.40%	146
Access to instructors	29.19%	54	18.48%	63	20.51%	104	17.51%	90
F/W/S classes were not offered	7.57%	14	16.42%	56	20.32%	103	22.96%	118
Make up for low grades in F/W/S	25.95%	48	30.21%	103	19.72%	100	15.18%	78
Class sizes were smaller	20.54%	38	20.53%	70	18.54%	94	19.65%	101
SS were affordable	36.22%	67	14.66%	50	16.57%	84	14.59%	75

Notes:

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- 2) More than one answer possible, percent calculated out of 341 sophomore participants.
- 3) More than one answer possible, percent calculated out of 507 junior participants.
- 4) More than one answer possible, percent calculated out of 514 senior participants.

Table A11: How did financial aid affect your decision to take summer courses at UCR?

	Freshman		Sophomores		Juniors		Seniors	
	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number
I took 12 units to qualify for financial aid, but did not really want to take this many units	22.16%	41	34.02%	116	42.41%	215	31.91%	164
Money did not affect my decision	32.43%	60	36.36%	124	29.19%	148	37.74%	194
I just "needed" one class and financial aid did not affect that	30.81%	57	17.60%	60	15.58%	79	14.59%	75
Even with financial aid, I could not afford 12 units and took fewer	9.73%	18	8.21%	28	9.47%	48	10.12%	52

Notes:

- 1) More than one answer possible, percent calculated out of 185 freshman participants.
- 2) More than one answer possible, percent calculated out of 341 sophomore participants.
- 3) More than one answer possible, percent calculated out of 507 junior participants.
- 4) More than one answer possible, percent calculated out of 514 senior participants.