

Introduction

The Office of Institutional Planning and Analysis administered the *Fall 2005 New Student Survey* to gather information on students'

- academic and social expectations
- satisfaction with facilities, student services, and campus life
- study and social skills
- hours spent studying, socializing, and relaxing
- reasons for applying to and enrolling at UC Merced
- plans for obtaining degrees at UC Merced and elsewhere, and
- plans for summer school (Summer, 2006).

A copy of the survey is reproduced in Appendix A.

The survey was administered electronically to all 835 undergraduate students. A letter from the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs was emailed to undergraduates explaining the purposes of the survey and inviting their voluntary participation. Students were directed to a secure website¹, where the survey could be completed in approximately ten minutes. Survey responses were automatically recorded in an electronic database. Students had two weeks to complete the survey. To enhance the response rate, the Vice Chancellor's letter indicated that two students would be randomly selected from those completing the survey to receive a gift from the university bookstore. In addition, three gentle e-mail reminders were sent to non-respondents over the course of the two weeks. By the time the response period closed, 420 students, or 50.3% of undergraduates, completed all or part of the survey.

Although there is considerable discussion about response rates for web-based surveys in the methodological literature, there is no consensus regarding minimally acceptable response rates (Schonlau, Fricker, and Elliott, 2002). By way of comparison, in 2002 the University of California Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES) was administered to all freshmen and seniors enrolled at the eight undergraduate campuses of the UC system, as well as first- and second-year transfer students. Approximately 17,000 responses were obtained, for an overall response rate of 24 percent. In 2003, a smaller-scale survey targeted a sample of 16,000 students systemwide, and focused on increasing response rates by contacting students through multiple methods. Overall, the 2003 UCUES response rate reached 42 percent (6,658 responses), with response rates at or above 50 percent at three campuses (Flacks, Thomson, Douglas, and Caspary, 2002). One U.S. meta-analysis of web-based surveys found an average response rate of 42% over 68 surveys (Cook, Heath, and Thompson 2000), while another European meta-analysis found an average rate of 42% over 89 surveys (Manfreda and Vehovar 2002). It appears that the 50.3% rate obtained in the *2005 New Student Survey* is in the expected range for web-based surveys.

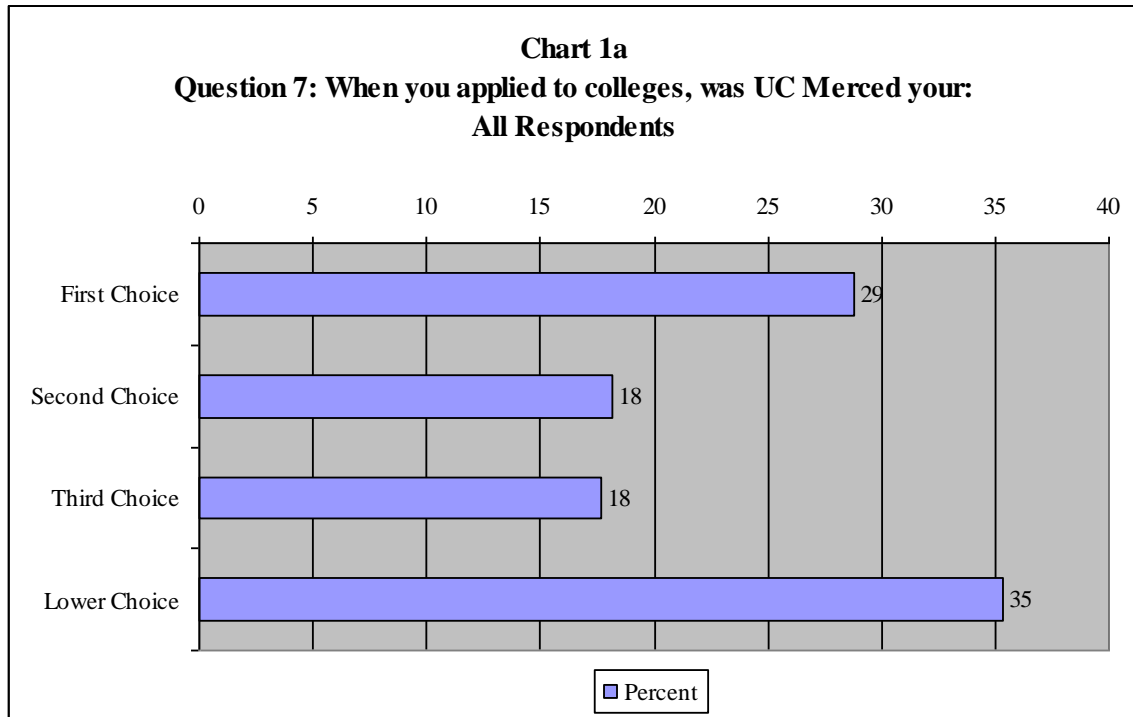
¹ The Office of Institutional Planning & Analysis is indebted to the expert help of Dr. German Gavilan, Assistant Dean, and Ms. Yiguo Zhan, graduate student, both in the School of Engineering. They developed the web survey application and managed both the survey process and the web site.

There is general agreement in the survey literature that a representative sample is more important than a high response rate. Table 1 provides figures comparing the Fall 2005 undergraduate population to the survey respondents. The distribution of respondents by class, gender, race and ethnicity, and region almost mirrors the student population, which strongly suggests that the sample is representative of the population.

Table 1 Comparison of Student Population and Survey Respondents				
	Population		Survey Respondents	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Class				
Freshmen	705	84.4	356	84.8
Sophomore	11	1.3	7	1.7
Junior	119	14.3	57	13.6
Totals	835	100.0	420	100.0
Gender				
Male	411	49.2	195	46.4
Female	424	50.8	225	53.6
Totals	835	100.0	420	100.0
Race/Ethnicity				
African-American	54	6.5	23	5.5
Asian/PI	316	37.8	149	35.5
Hispanic	207	24.8	107	25.5
White, Non-Hispanic	223	26.7	121	28.8
Other/Missing	35	4.2	20	4.8
Totals	835	100.0	420	100.0
Region				
San Joaquin Valley	278	33.3	158	37.6
SF Bay Area	230	27.5	117	27.9
Southern California	257	30.8	116	27.6
Other CA/Missing	70	8.4	29	6.9
Totals	835	100.0	420	100.0

Applying to and Attending UC Merced

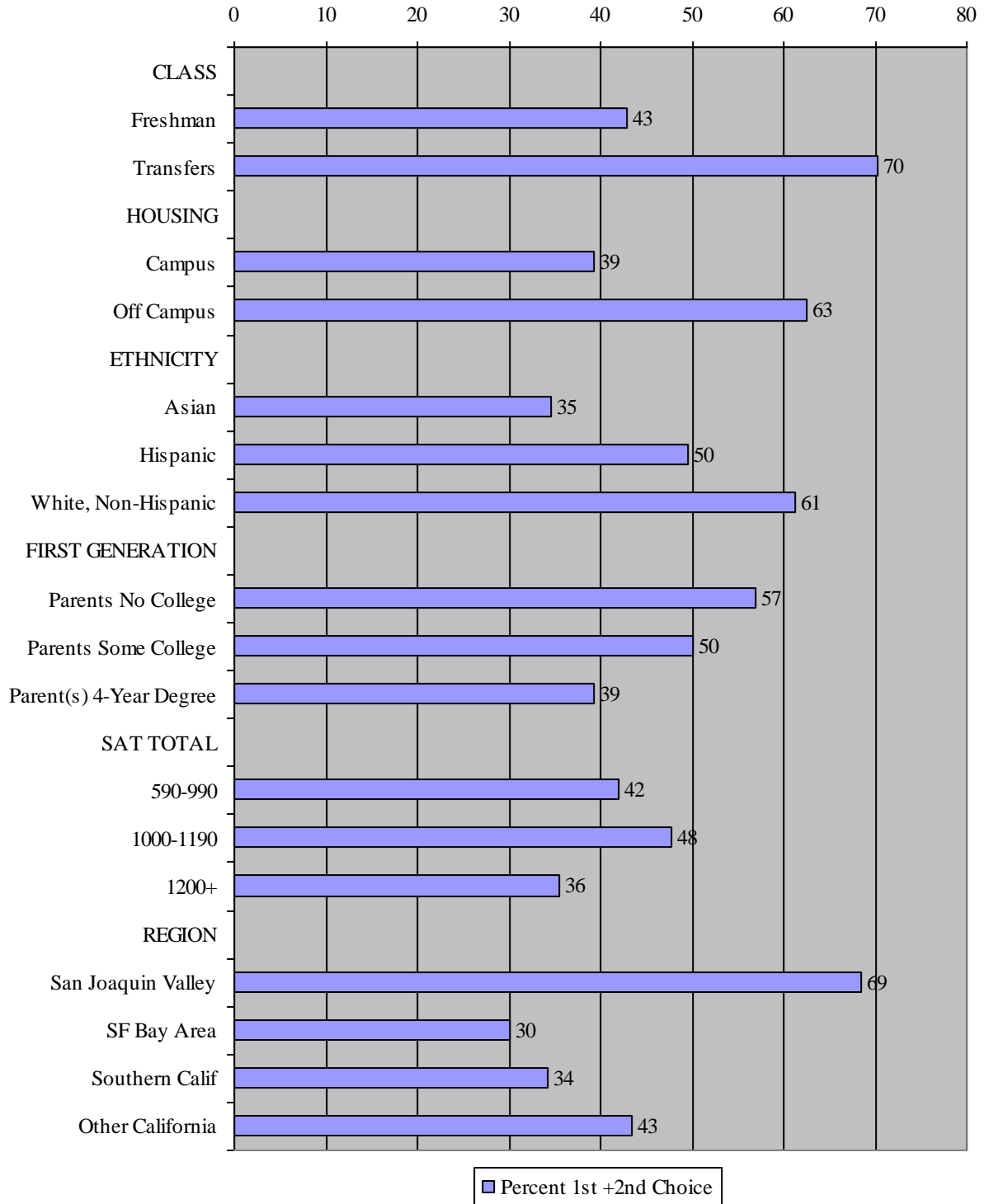
The survey asked three questions about applying to and attending UC Merced. Question 7 asked respondents to indicate whether UC Merced was their first choice, second choice, third choice, or lower choice college. As summarized in Chart 1, overall only 29% of respondents indicated that UC Merced was their first choice college.



The relative ranking of UC Merced among respondents varied substantially by a number of factors. Those factors that were statistically significant are summarized in Chart 1b below, and Table A2 in the Appendix.

- **Class:** Transfer students were much more likely than freshman to list UC Merced as their first or second choice (70% vs. 43%), not surprising given the fact that a large majority of transfer students come from (69%) and live off campus (88%) in San Joaquin Valley.
- **Housing:** Undergraduates living on campus, 97% of whom are freshman, were less likely than those living off campus to favor UC Merced as a first or second choice (39% vs. 63%).
- **Race/Ethnicity:** White, Non-Hispanics (61%) ranked UC Merced higher than Hispanics (50%), who in turn ranked the campus higher than Asians (35%).

Chart 1b
Factors Associated with Ranking UC Merced First or Second Choice



- **First Generation:** Research shows that first generation students are at a distinct disadvantage in gaining access to, and succeeding, in postsecondary education (Chen and Carroll 2005). First Generation students whose parents had no college experience were more likely to prefer UC Merced than first generation students whose parents had some college experience but no four-year degrees (57% vs. 50%). In turn, students who have at least one parent with a four-year college degree were least likely to rank UC Merced as a first or second choice (39%).
- **SAT Scores:** The relationship between total SAT scores and UC Merced preferences is not straightforward, but those with the highest scores (1200 and above) listed the Merced campus first or second less often (36%) than those with lower SATs (590-990=42%, 1000-1190=42%), presumably because they (high scorers) held higher aspirations for admission to more selective colleges.
- **Region:** San Joaquin Valley residents clearly preferred UC Merced (69%) more than residents from other regions: San Francisco Bay Area (30%), Southern California(34%), and other parts of California (43%). As already noted, a large majority of transfers hail from the San Joaquin Valley. In addition, 64% of the San Joaquin Valley undergraduates are first generation students.

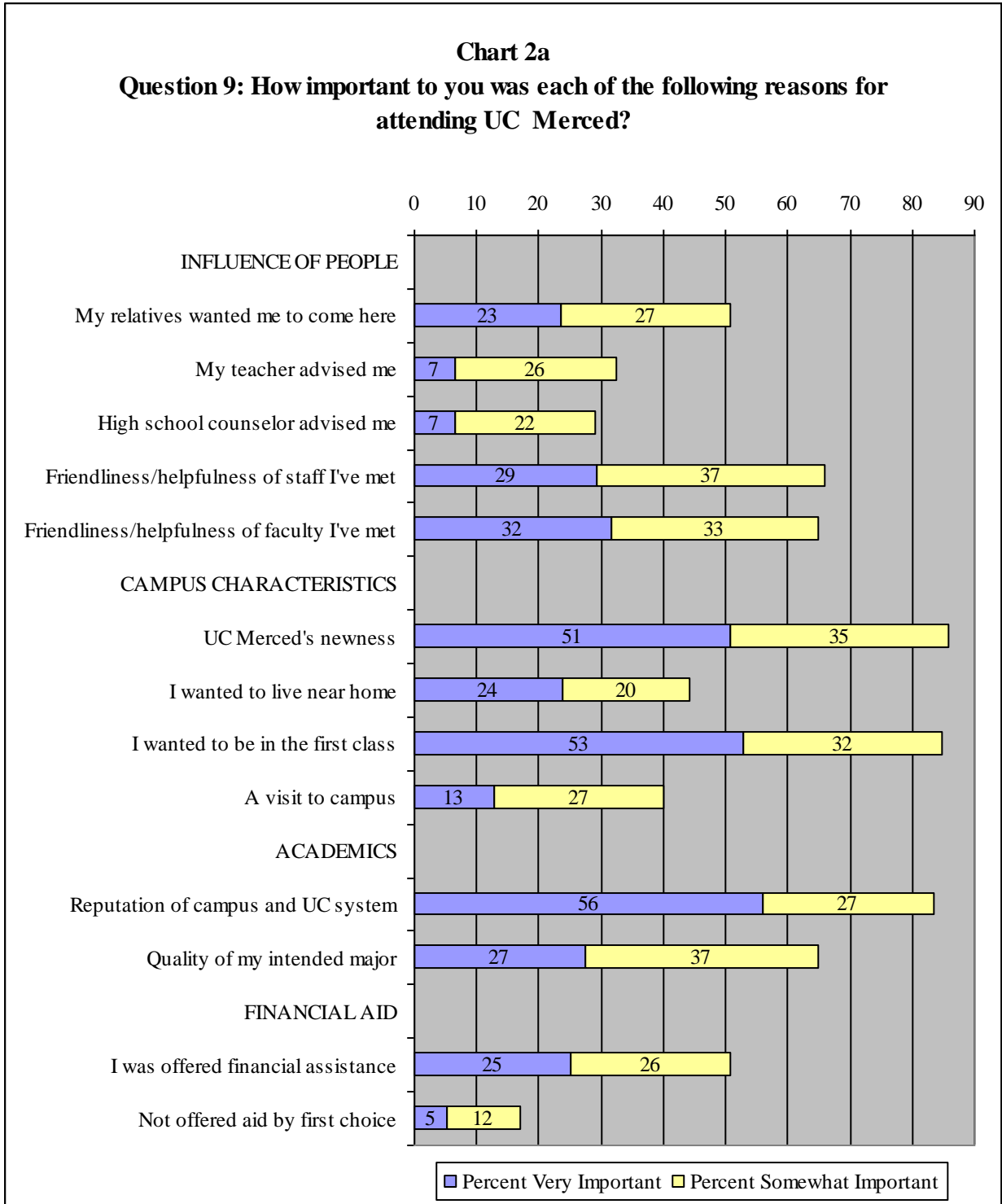
As a follow-up to Question 7, Question 8 asked those respondents who ranked UC Merced as a second or lower choice to identify their first choice colleges. Of the 282 respondents that ranked UC Merced lower than first, 258 provided answers indicating their first choice. Table 3 lists the first choice schools and the number of respondents identifying each school.

Table 3			
Question 8: If UC Merced was not your first choice, please indicate which college/university was your first choice.			
University of California System	185	Other Colleges Outside California	24
Berkeley	28	Albertson College	1
Davis	50	Baylor University	2
Irvine	22	Boston University	1
Los Angeles	32	Brigham Young University	1
Riverside	2	Clark University	1
San Diego	23	Connecticut College	1
Santa Barbara	14	Cornell University	1
Santa Cruz	14	George Washington University	1
"Other UCs"	4	Massachusetts Institute of Technology	1
		New York University	1
California State University System	12	Northeastern University	1
Fresno	2	Seattle University	1
Fullerton	1	Smith College	1
Long Beach	1	St. Johns University	1
Pomona	2	State University of New York at Oswego	1
San Luis Obispo	3	Stevens Institute of Technology	1
San Diego	1	United States Coast Guard Academy	1
San Jose	1	United States Military Academy	1
Stanislaus	1	University of Hawaii	1
		University of Portland	1
Other Colleges in California	37	University of Puget Sound	1
California Institute of Technology	1	University of Washington	1
California School of Culinary Arts	1	Xavier University	1
Chapman University	1		
Dominican University of California	1		
Fresno Pacific University	1		
Loyola Marymount University	3		
Pepperdine University	2		
Santa Clara University	4		
Stanford University	3		
University of Redlands	1		
University of San Diego	1		
University of San Francisco	1		
University of Southern California	10		
University of the Pacific	7		

- A large majority (185 or 71.7%) listed another UC campus as their first choice. The other Central Valley campus, UC Davis (50), was the most frequently cited first choice, followed in order by UCLA (32), Berkeley (28) San Diego (23), Irvine 22, Santa Barbara (14), Santa Cruz (14), and Riverside (2).
- A tiny minority (12 respondents or 4.7%) identified California State University campuses, including Fresno, Fullerton, Long Beach, Pomona, San Luis Obispo, San Jose, and Stanislaus.
- The remaining 61 respondents (23.6%) identified 37 other institutions. Thirty-seven respondents (14.7% overall) cited 14 schools located in California. The two most frequently cited were the University of Southern California (10) and University of the Pacific (7).
- Finally, 24 respondents (9.3% overall) listed another 23 colleges and universities scattered across the county.

Question 9 asked respondents “How important to you was each of the following reasons for attending UC Merced,” then listed thirteen reasons focusing on the influence of people, campus characteristics, academics, and financial aid. Respondents could answer Very Important, Somewhat Important, or Not Important. The results are summarized in Chart 2a and in Table A3 in the Appendix.

- Overall, a substantial majority of respondents identified two Campus Characteristics as the most important reasons for attending UC Merced, the campus’ newness (86% Very or Somewhat Important) and the opportunity to be in the first graduating class (85%). Presumably the significance of these two factors will decline as the campus matures. However, a third closely related Academic characteristic was almost as important and is likely to remain significant overtime, the reputation of the campus and the UC system as a whole (83%).
- A large majority of respondents were importantly influenced by the friendliness and helpfulness of the faculty (65%) and staff (66%) they had met, and the quality of their intended majors (66%).
- A bare majority cited financial assistance (51%) and the influence of relatives (also 51%) as Very or Somewhat Important to their decision to attend UC Merced.
- A large minority identified two Campus Characteristics as being important to their attendance at UC Merced, the campus’ nearness to their home (44%) and a campus visit (40%).
- Less than a third of respondents indicated that the advice of high schools teachers (33%) or counselors (28.9%) was important for their decision to attend UC Merced.



- Finally, just 17% said the lack of financial aid from their first choice school importantly influenced attendance.

The reasons offered for attending UC Merced also substantially by various factors. Those factors that were statistically significant are summarized in Charts 2b-2? below, and Table A4 in the Appendix.

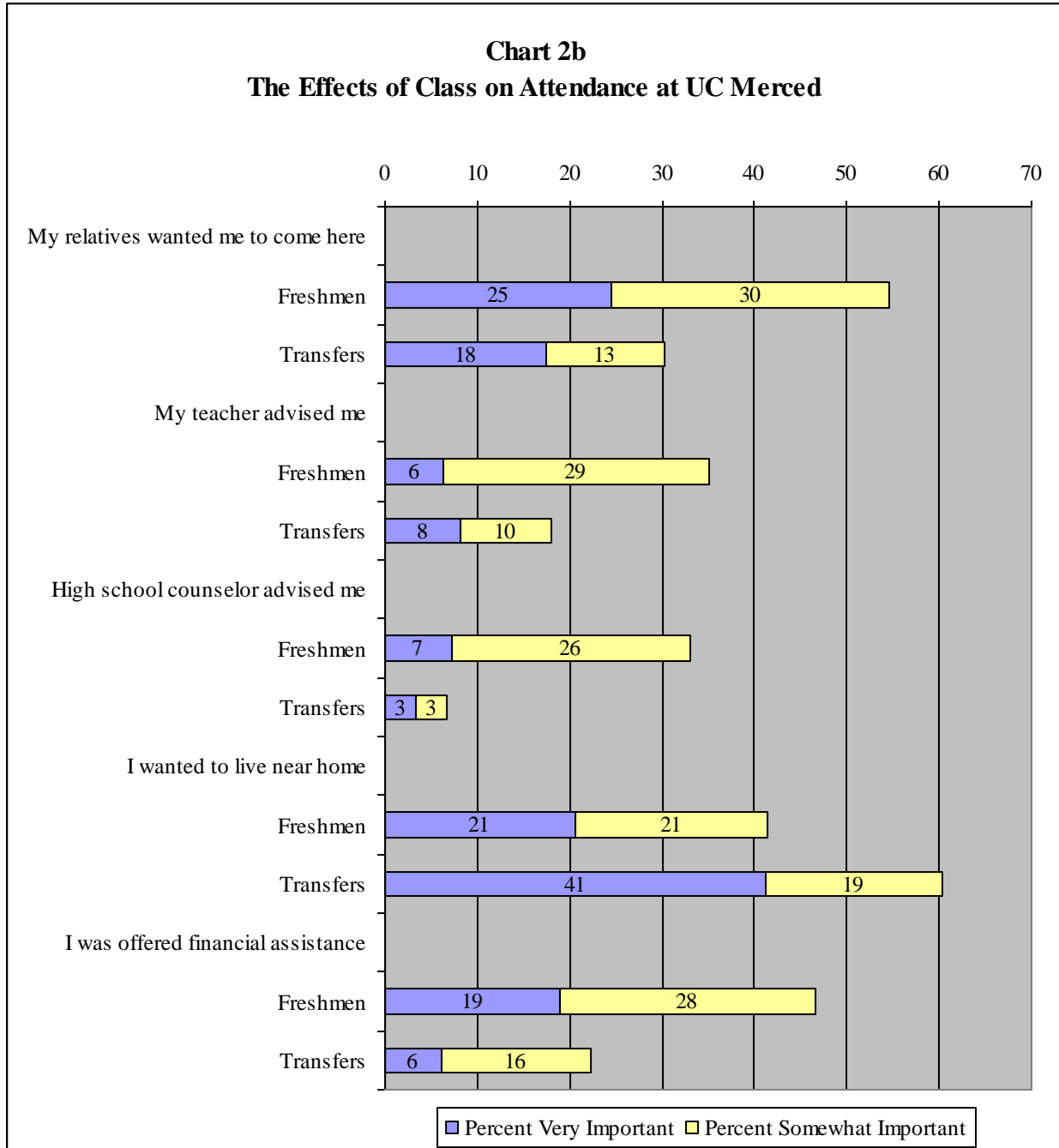
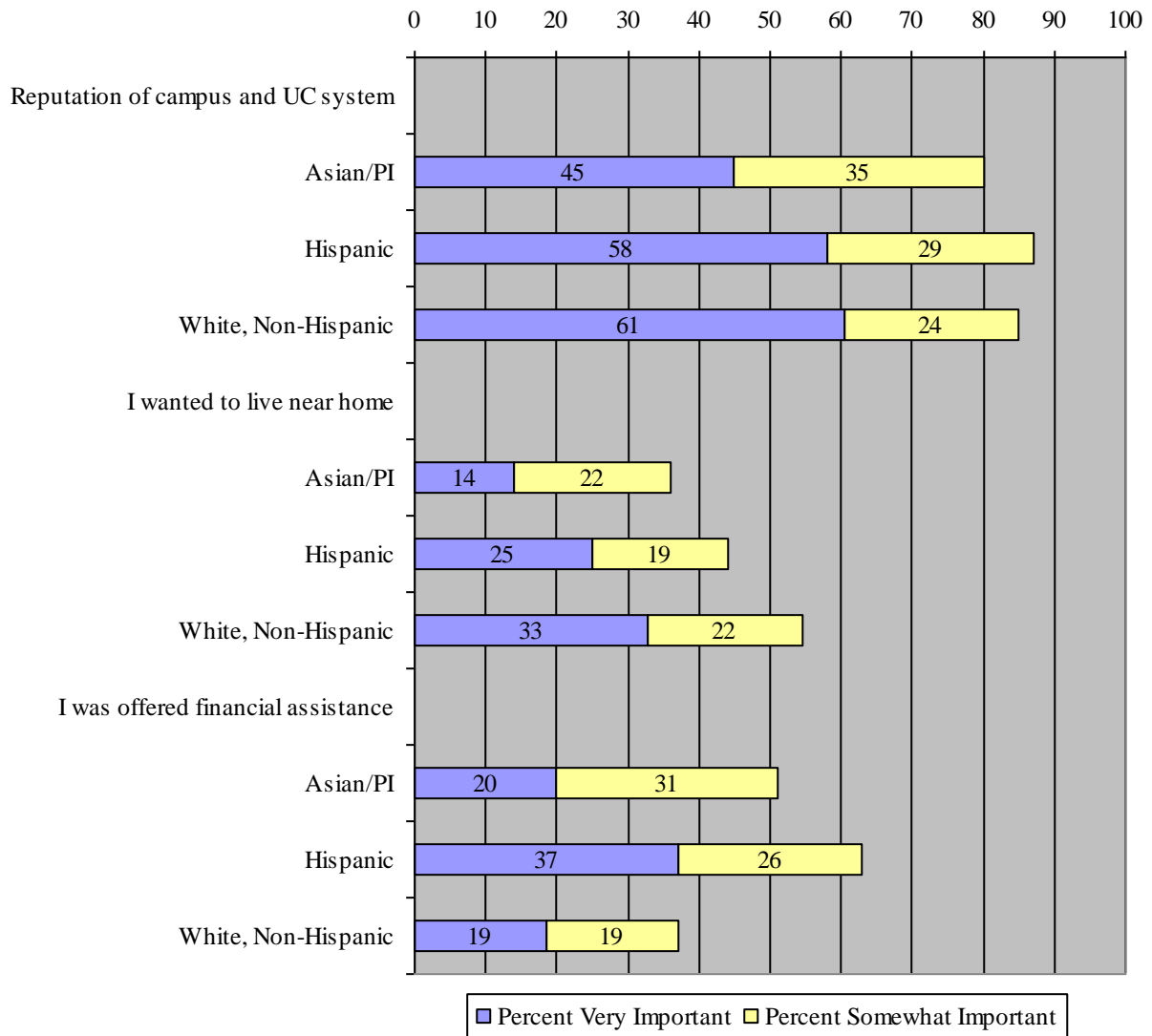


Chart 2c
The Effects of Race/Ethnicity on Attendance at UC Merced



References

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- Schonlau, Matthias, Ronald D. Fricker, Jr., and Marc N. Elliott. 2002. *Conducting Research Surveys via E-mail and the Web*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND.

Appendix

Table A1: Data for Chart 1a		
Question 7: When you applied to college, was UC Merced your:		
	Count	Percent
First Choice	114	28.8
Second Choice	72	18.2
Third Choice	70	17.7
Less Than Third Choice	140	35.4
Total	396	100.0

Table A2: Data for Charts 1b-1d				
Factors Associated with Ranking UC Merced First or Second Choice				
	Count	Ranking of College Choices		
		1st	2nd	1st + 2nd
Class				
Freshman	334	24.0	18.9	42.9
Transfers	62	54.8	14.5	69.3
Housing				
Campus	265	19.6	19.6	39.2
Off Campus	131	47.3	15.3	62.6
Ethnicity				
Asian	136	18.4	16.2	34.6
Hispanic	99	33.3	16.2	49.5
White, Non-Hispanic	119	37.8	23.5	61.3
First Generation				
Parents No College	144	41.0	16.0	57.0
Parents Some College	28	25.0	25.0	50.0
Parent(s) 4-Year Degree	183	20.2	19.1	39.3
SAT Total				
590-990	112	25.9	16.1	42.0
1000-1190	138	27.5	20.3	47.8
1200+	93	18.3	17.2	35.5

Table A2: Data for Charts 1b-1d				
Factors Associated with Ranking UC Merced First or Second Choice				
Region				
San Joaquin Valley	149	47.7	20.8	68.5
SF Bay Area	113	14.2	15.9	30.1
Southern California	105	20.0	14.3	34.3
Other California	23	21.7	21.7	43.4

Table 3A: Data for Charts 2a and 2b				
Question 9: How Important to you was each of the following reasons for attending UC Merced?				
Reasons	Count	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Total %
Influence of People				
My relatives wanted me to come here	397	23.4	27.2	50.6
My teacher advised me	394	6.6	25.9	32.5
High school counselor advised me	394	6.6	22.3	28.9
Friendliness/helpfulness of staff I've met	393	29.3	36.6	65.9
Friendliness/helpfulness of faculty I've met	391	31.7	33.2	65.0
Campus Characteristics				
UC Merced's newness	397	50.9	35.0	85.9
I wanted to live near home	397	23.9	20.4	44.3
I wanted to be in the first class	397	52.9	32.0	84.9
A visit to campus	394	12.9	27.2	40.1
Academics				
Reputation of campus and UC system	397	55.9	27.5	83.4
Quality of my intended major	393	27.5	37.4	64.9
Financial Aid				
I was offered financial assistance	395	25.1	25.8	50.9
Not offered aid by first choice	391	5.1	12.0	17.1