One size doesn't fit all

Alternative majors for first-year applicants to consider
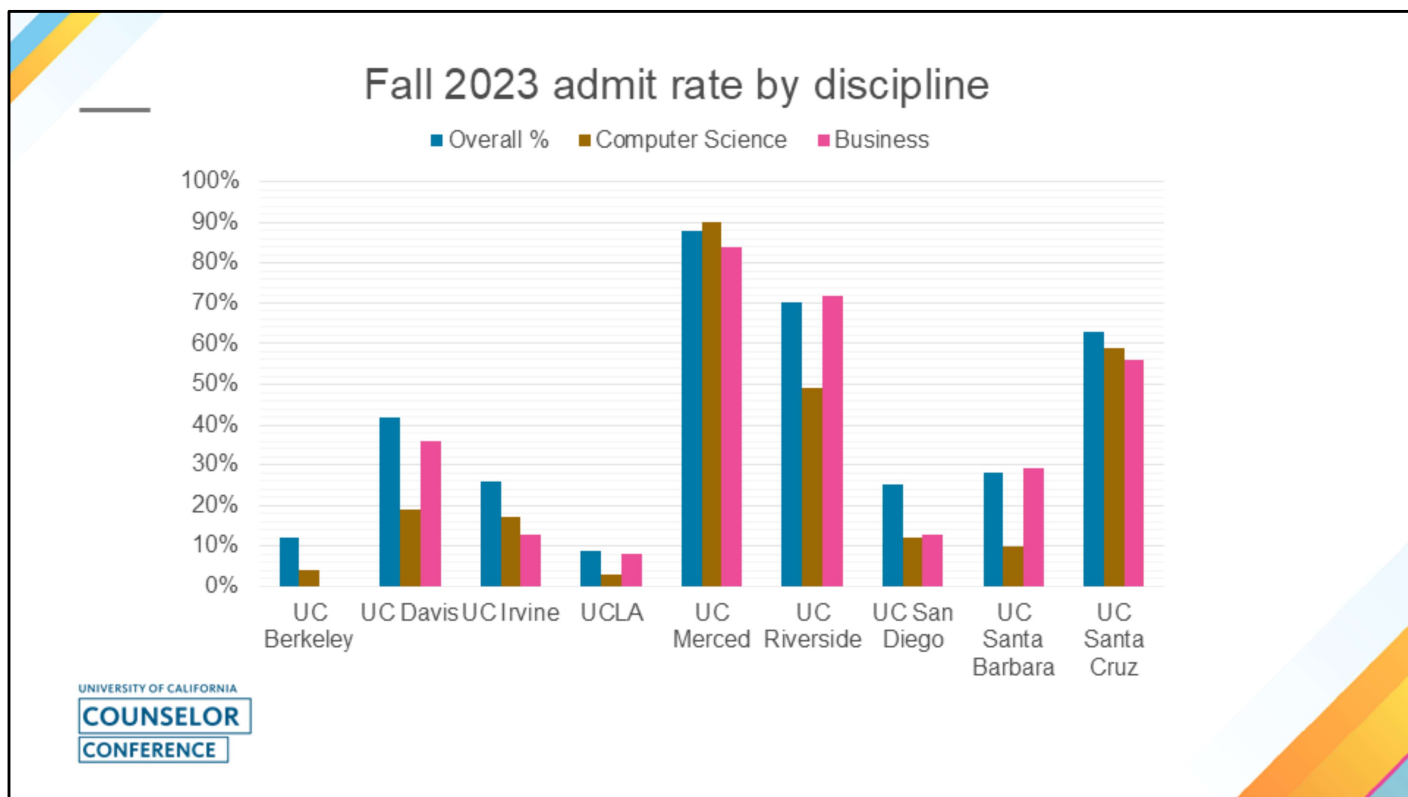
September 2025

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Outline

- **Discipline-specific fall admission rates**

- **Alternative major choices**

- **Unique majors**

- **Major advising for prospective UC applicants**

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Fall 2023 admit rate by discipline

We see here a chart for the Fall 2023 admit rates by discipline. This report was last updated in October 2024 due to the data being processed for the admit class of the previous Fall. *This is the most updated information since Fall 2024 admits numbers are still being worked on.* The information comes from the UC Info Center under the Freshman admission by discipline section.

Overall takeaway: A common trend is that admission rates for these competitive majors tend to be lower than the campus' overall admissions %. It is important to keep this in mind when your students mention an interest in these majors. We highlight the computer science and business majors in this graph because as you can see, across the table both major's admissions rates are lower than the campus' overall admission rate. They are a couple of the most competitive majors that first-year applicants apply to.

Things to consider when reviewing this chart
- While Biological Science and Psychology are competitive fields as well, the data is grouped with more broad spectrums and cannot showcase accurate numbers for those majors
- Lets take a look at some oddities in this chart.
    - Berkeley did not accept FR for their Business program until recently, so we do not have numbers for it.
    - Davis also just opened their Business major for the Fall of 2024. The number above is shown for Managerial Economics major.
    - Merced groups their Computer Science Engineering admissions stats with their whole Engineering program so we do not have a specific CS number

Looking at some of these admit rates can be a bit discouraging but we encourage you all to have conversations with student's interest and build on the majors lists that they are considering applying to.

Alternative majors

Exploring options: Alternatives for popular majors at UC

Psychology & cognitive science
- Sociology
- Neuroscience
- Human development
- Learning and behavioral sciences

Business and economics
- Mathematics or applied mathematics
- Anthropology
- Communication
- Actuarial science

Majors outside of biological science for pre-med interests
- Chemistry
- Public health
- Nutrition science
- Pharmacological chemistry/ Pharmaceutical sciences
- Any social science major
  - With a biological science minor

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Psychology, Business, and Pre-Med tracks are some of the most popular majors that incoming first-year students apply to at the UC. Here we have some alternative majors that students might consider if they want to apply to a less competitive major that still aligns with their interests and career goals.

Beyond the usual: Discover unique UC majors I

UC Berkeley
- Legal studies
- Nuclear engineering
- Celtic studies
- Social welfare

UC Davis
- Animal science
- Viticulture & enology
- Wildlife, fish, & conservation biology
- Science & technology studies

UC Irvine
- Nursing science
- Criminology, law, & society
- Informatics
- Software engineering

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UC Berkeley
- Legal Studies – Explores how law shapes society and behavior.
- Nuclear Engineering – Specialized program in nuclear energy and safety.
- Celtic Studies – Focuses on Celtic languages, history, and culture.
- Social Welfare – Studies social systems and their impact on communities.

UC Davis
- Animal Science – Focuses on animal health, biology, and hands-on care.
- Viticulture & Enology – Covers the science of grape growing and winemaking.
- Wildlife, Fish & Conservation Biology – Studies and protects wild animal populations and ecosystems.
- Science & Technology Studies – Looks at how science and tech impact society and culture.

UC Irvine
- Nursing Science – Prepares for clinical nursing careers.
- Criminology, Law & Society – Studies crime and justice systems.
- Informatics – Combines tech, design, and health solutions.
- Software Engineering – Builds reliable, scalable software systems.

Beyond the usual: Discover unique UC majors II

UCLA
- Music industry
- Public affairs
- Design media arts
- Climate science

UC Merced
- Ground & aerial robotics
- Critical race & ethnic studies
- Public health

UC Riverside
- Robotics
- Public policy
- Dance theory
- Creative writing

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UCLA
- Music Industry- A leadership-focused degree for careers in music business, production, and entrepreneurship
- Public Affairs – Trains students for roles in policy, nonprofits, and government.
- Design Media Arts – Tech-driven artistic innovation.
- Climate Science – Studies Earth's climate and its environmental impact.

UC Merced
- Ground & Aerial Robotics – Robotics for land and sky.
- Critical Race & Ethnic Studies – Explores race, power, and identity across disciplines.
- Global Arts Studies – Blends theory and practice in world visual and performing arts.
- Public Health – Focuses on health equity and disease prevention locally and globally.

UC Riverside
- Robotics- Teaches design and building of robots for real-world use in healthcare, agriculture, and AI, with hands-on experience.
- Public Policy – Prepares students to analyze and shape effective social policies.
- Dance Theory – Dance as cultural critique and expression.
- Creative Writing – Offers training in fiction, poetry, nonfiction, and other literary forms.

UC San Diego
- Nanoengineering: Engineering at the molecular level.
- Marine Biology: Life and ecosystems in the ocean.
- Speculative Design: Design thinking meets future scenarios.
- Pharmacological Chemistry: The science behind drug development.

UC Santa Barbara
- Aquatic Biology: Freshwater and marine life.
- Biopsychology: Biology behind human behavior.
- Zoology: Animal biology and ecosystems.
- Actuarial Science: Math for financial risk assessment.

UC Santa Cruz
- Astrophysics: Study the universe at large.
- Community Studies: Real-world change via fieldwork.
- Technology & Information Management: Business meets tech innovation.
- Art & Design: Games & Playable Media: Game design as storytelling.

Major advising

Tips for helping your student find the right major

Careers may not be as closely related to an undergraduate major.
Empower your students to consider various pathways for their career interest.

Work backwards

Research careers and areas of interest; what degrees do those professionals have?

Visit department websites

View course requirements, faculty, research, career outcomes and more

Apply undeclared

Undeclared is an option at all UC campuses, allowing students the opportunity to explore

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Career outcomes are beyond just the major

UC will help your students get wherever they want to go, regardless of major

- **Academic advising**
  - Campus and department depending, students can change their major, customize their courses, add minors etc.
- **Experiential opportunities**
  - Research, internships, jobs, clubs
- **Career centers**
  - Support from first-year through alumni status
  - Career exploration, networking, job search support, etc.

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https://accountability.universityofcalifornia.edu/2025/chapters/chapter-3.html

https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/about-us/information-center/uc-alumni-work

https://www.ucop.edu/institutional-research-academic-planning/_files/value-of-degree-full-report.pdf

Thank you

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