
UC majors marketplace: The best selection across nine locations

September 2026

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Session overview

Today we'll discuss

- Identifying choice of major
- Defining major selection
- Beyond the major
- Questions

Major choice in admissions

While the UC system has some general advice for all applicants, in some instances, it depends.

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A person with blonde hair, wearing a black t-shirt and blue jeans, is sitting on a light-colored floor. They are working on a craft project, possibly a bag or a piece of clothing, using a needle and thread. The floor is covered with various craft materials: a pile of colorful fabrics (pink, purple, blue, black), a red fabric bow, a large red floral embroidery patch, a string of red beads, a string of black beads, a string of blue and red beads, a wooden ring, a wooden handle, a small container of pins, and a small red flower. The person is wearing a silver bracelet on their right wrist and brown boots. The background is a plain white wall.

Why we pick a major

Majors at the UC marketplace

With 870+ degrees...

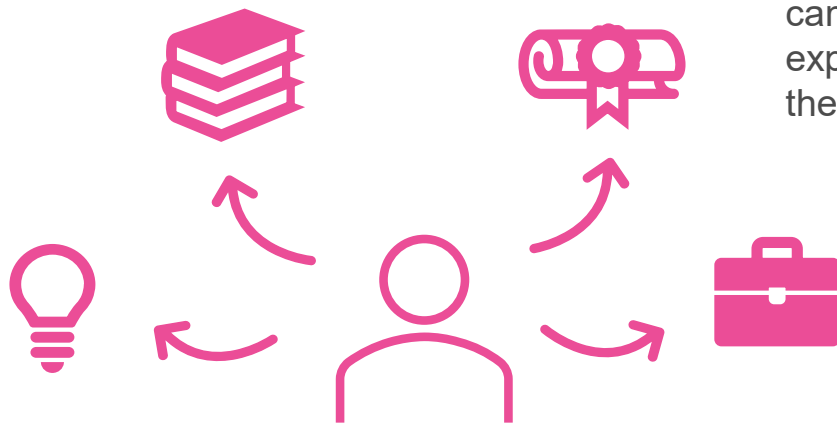
UC offers a diverse catalogue of areas of study for students to explore. Students may even entertain double majors or minors!

And thousands of careers...

Selecting an area of study will help students navigate selecting a career path but should not limit their options. Most careers do not require a specific major.

Finding an interest is just the start!

On the UC application, students express an interest in a field which will help campuses understand best how they fit into the UC community. Some campuses allow students to explore within a field or to change their major.



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Majors quiz for specific campuses

Some of our campuses have major quizzes available to help students explore campus specific programs and schools to get a sense of area of interest!

UC Irvine



UCLA



UC Davis



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A young man with dark, wavy hair and a light beard is smiling and looking off to the side. He is wearing a light grey hoodie and has a black backpack on his shoulders. He is standing next to a large, vibrant green fern plant. In the background, there is a modern building with a white wall and a doorway. The overall scene is bright and outdoors.

Choosing majors from the UC marketplace

Finding the right fit

While the UC system offers many similar programs, individual campuses may have specific majors and departments unique to their own university!

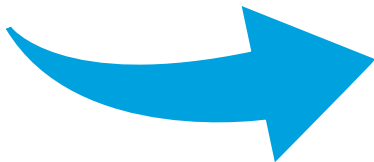
Encourage students to prioritize their areas of interest and work backwards to identify which campus is right for them.

Help students navigate their academic interest by utilizing our [UC majors search engine](#)!

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Same aisle, different names

The majors across UC campuses can all be grouped into similar academic disciplines even though the major's name may vary.

Biological & Life Sciences

Physiology
(UC Santa Barbara)

Physiology &
Exercise Sciences
(UC Irvine)

Architectural and Environmental Design and Planning

Architecture
(UC Berkeley)

Landscape Architecture
(UC Davis)

Engineering & Computer Science

Robotics
(UC Riverside)

Mech Engineering with a
Specialization in
Controls and Robotics
(UC San Diego)

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What unique majors may look like

Rhetoric

(UC Berkeley)

Clinical Nutrition

(UC Davis)

**Science,
Technology, &
Ethics**

(UC Merced)

Agroecology

(UC Santa Cruz)

**Real Estate and
Development**

(UC San Diego)

**Criminology, Law,
& Society**

(UC Irvine)

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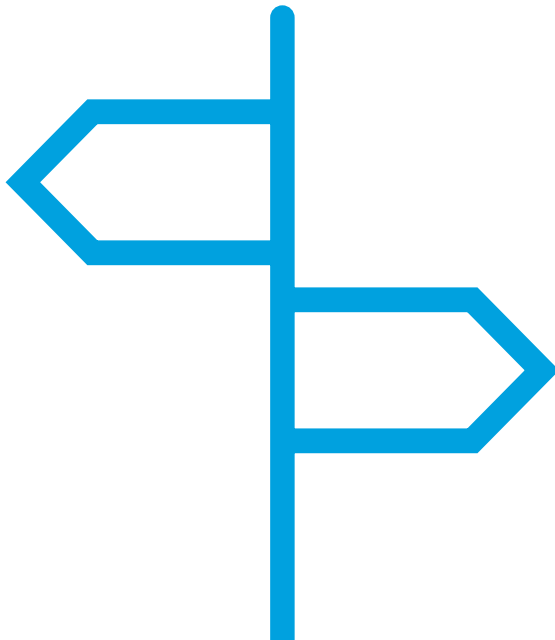
Primary and alternate majors



Primary and alternate majors

Primary major

An applicant's first choice of major they want to pursue. Applicants do not need to select the same or similar majors for each UC.



Alternate major

A student's second choice major in the case that a campus cannot place a student in their first choice. Alternate majors should be in a subject that a student wants to study.

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Fact or fiction?

**All UCs consider students for a
primary and alternate major.**

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Fiction!

Not all UCs consider students for an alternate major

Campus	Alternate major consideration?
Berkeley	No
Davis	Yes
Irvine	Yes, but case-by-case
UCLA	Not guaranteed
Merced	Yes

Campus	Alternate major consideration?
Riverside	Yes
San Diego	Yes; encouraged for select majors
Santa Barbara	Yes; encouraged for select majors
Santa Cruz	Yes; encouraged for select majors

More detailed information can be found on page 31 of the [Quick Reference Guide.](#)

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Major choice and first-year selection



Do campuses use major choice during selection?

It depends!

A student's first choice major may have an impact in their admission selection. Each campus has their own policies depending on specific programs that they offer.



Want to see more?

See pages 30 and 31 of the [Quick Reference Guide](#) or contact each campus for more information or specific questions.

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Selective majors

What does selective major mean?

- Selective majors are those that receive more interest than there are available spaces.
- These majors are very popular, meaning that departments cannot always welcome all qualified students.

What if the major my student wants is selective?

Students should still apply to their desired major but should consider an alternate major that is related — but not selective — when available.

See page 32 in the [Quick Reference Guide](#) to learn which colleges or majors are most selective at each campus

Supplemental applications and auditions

- Some majors may require applicants to submit supplemental materials.
- Requirements for supplemental applications will vary by campus and program.
- Pay close attention to the deadlines for supplemental applications!
- See pages 31-32 of the [Quick Reference Guide](#).

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Freshman admission by discipline dashboard



[Freshman Admission by Discipline Dashboard](#)

- Explore campus admission data across broad disciplines
- Compare campus admission stats within a broad discipline
- **Use caution in drawing conclusions from this information**

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Fact or Fiction?
Applying as
Undecided/Undeclared will
negatively impact a student's
application.

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Fiction!

Generally, applying Undeclared does not affect admission and offers an opportunity for students to explore before declaring a major.

However, we encourage students to apply directly to their major of interest if they know what that major is, especially when the major or academic school/department that they're interested in is a highly selective program.

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Undeclared during selection

Each campus may have specific guidance for Undeclared

Campus	Impact of Undeclared
Berkeley	No impact in Letters and Science, but be aware of selective majors
Davis	No impact
Irvine	No impact
UCLA	No impact in Letters and Science; Undeclared-Engineering has space limitations
Merced	No impact

Campus	Impact of Undeclared
Riverside	No impact, but not available in all colleges
San Diego	No impact, but be aware of selective majors
Santa Barbara	Only available for College of Letters and Science
Santa Cruz	No impact, but be aware of selective majors

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More detailed information can be found on page 30 of the [Quick Reference Guide](#).

A woman with dark hair, wearing a light blue cardigan and blue pants, is standing in an orange orchard. She is reaching up to pick a ripe orange from a tree. The orchard is filled with green leaves and many bright orange fruits. The ground is covered with fallen orange leaves. The scene is captured in a cinematic style with soft lighting.

Beyond the major

Aligning career goals

We like to remind students that their major does not dictate their career. We can encourage students to keep in mind:

- Your major does not determine what your career will be.
- There are many ways to get to the same end goal.
- Find majors that can fit your broad interest and skillset.

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Questions we can ask our students

**What type of
work do you
want to do?**

**What are your
interests and
passions?**

**What are your
favorite
subjects or
classes?**

**Are you open to
exploring
different
options?**

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Major advising

Remind students that they should not “game the system”. Some advice to share:

- Choose the major(s) you want.
- There's opportunity to double major or minor outside of your assigned major.
- Change of major is not guaranteed
 - Some majors may be restricted
 - **Competitive/selective** majors for applicants may still be **competitive and selective** for current students

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**“The value of a UC education
goes beyond a major”**

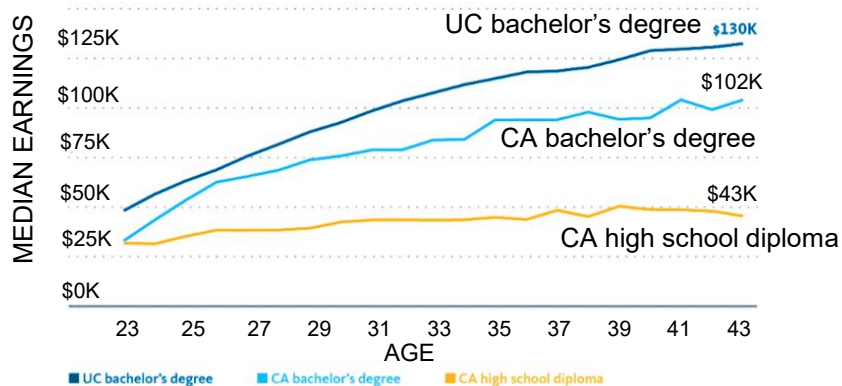
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UC career outcomes

UC undergraduate alumni median earnings by age
Compared to California averages



Sources: UC undergraduate alumni data for calendar year 2024 from California Employment Development Department; California median income data from U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates Public Use Microdata Sample 2024

By the numbers

- 63% of UC's California undergrads finish their degree with ZERO student loans
- In-state students who do take loans graduate with an average of \$17,300 in debt. That's \$10,000 less than the national average
- The majority of UC's low-income undergrads out-earn their parents within 3 years of graduation.

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Research universities teach more than theory

Major impact

A major is one part of the UC education.

The skills developed through the UC education often have the greatest long-term impact.

What do students gain from a UC education regardless of major?

Applicable key skills

- Analytical skills
- Critical thinking
- Networking
- Communication
- Problem solving
- Collaboration
- Quantitative reasoning

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Research, inquiry and discovery

What makes UC different?

- Student: Engage in inquiry, analysis, and problem-solving
- Faculty: Teach and conduct groundbreaking research
- Research: Discover how knowledge is created and applied

Learning how to think, not just what to know

UC supplements academic learning beyond the classroom. From study abroad to research and various extracurriculars, students will be encouraged to pursue a well-rounded educational experience.

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Useful campus charts and where to find them

Quick Reference Guide to UC Admission

- Does applying Undeclared have any bearing on admission? **Page 30**
- When is intended major a factor? **Page 30 and 31**
- Is an alternate major considered? **Page 31**
- Which majors require an audition or supplemental app? **Page 31 and 32**
- Which colleges or majors are most selective for first-years? **Page 32**

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Thank you