Welcome to the UC Counselor Conference session in “Deconstructing the UC PIQ’s.”

The goal of this session is to help counselors work with freshman applicants to the University of California. Thank you for helping UC admissions staff share details about the UC application and in particular the personal insight questions.
Goals for this session:
This UC Counselor Conference session was created to be a resource for counselors who want to understand the personal insight questions or PIQs. If you have asked, “what is UC asking?” then this session is for you. The presentation also shares answers to the most common questions and clarifies myths associated with the UC PIQ’s. We won’t be showcasing writing samples or PIQ answers submitted in past application cycles. We want to highlight that there is not a template for a great PIQ response. In later slides we will also share details on individual UC campus webpages and UCOP links you can share with students.
An Overview of the Personal Insight Questions

The Personal Insight Questions or PIQ’s are the written portion of the UC application, however they are not essays.

The directors of admission across the UC system created eight questions that students are asked to read and review. Of the eight questions, each applicant must select four questions to answer. Students cannot answer more than four. Each PIQ response has a maximum of 350 words, this is showcased to students with a word counter posted in the application. We suggest a response have between 250-350 words. Responses that are less than 250 words lack substance and often leave the reader with more questions, than answers.

There is no preference for which questions the student should answer. Each question ties to one or more of the UC’s 13 admissions selection factors. We hope counselors will ask students to select questions which share new information about the student, clarify details about accomplishments reported in the application, and/or showcase the students abilities. Statistically, applicant data shows that no one question is answered more than another. When we share that all questions have equal value, we mean that every question has the potential to be the “right question” for a student. There is no advantage to answering one topic/question over another.
Lastly, we remind you that there are also two ‘additional comments’ sections with 550 characters and 550 words available in the academic history and personal insight sections, respectively. Details about the academic history additional comments section can be found in the UC application overview hosted during the counselor conference.

Weblinks and Resources:
• **Personal Insight Questions**
  https://admission.universityofcalifornia.edu/how-to-apply/applying-as-a-freshman/personal-insight-questions.html
• **13 Factors for Comprehensive Review**
  https://admission.universityofcalifornia.edu/how-to-apply/applying-as-a-freshman/how-applications-are-reviewed.html
The Personal Insight Questions
The Personal Insight Questions for the class of 2022 can be found online. The questions did not change from last year. Freshman applicants may have seen the questions last year. Each question is associated with a number for clarification, they are not ranked. Questions 1-4 are listed on this slide. We have highlighted the main theme of each question in gold for your reference.

1. Describe an example of your **leadership** experience in which you have positively influenced others, helped resolve disputes or contributed to group efforts over time.

2. Every person has a **creative** side, and it can be expressed in many ways: problem solving, original and innovative thinking, and artistically, to name a few. Describe how you express your creative side.

3. What would you say is your **greatest talent or skill**? How have you developed and demonstrated that talent over time?

4. Describe how you have taken advantage of a **significant educational opportunity** or worked to overcome an educational barrier you have faced.

**UC Personal Insight Questions**
5. Describe the most **significant challenge** you have faced and the steps you have taken to overcome this challenge. How has this challenge affected your academic achievement?

6. Think about an **academic subject** that inspires you. Describe how you have furthered this interest inside and/or outside of the classroom.

7. What have you done to make your school or your **community** a better place?

8. Beyond what has already been shared in your application, what do you believe **makes you stand out** as a strong candidate for admissions to the University of California?
freshman/personal-insight-questions.html.
“Help students realize that they have a story to tell. They should take advantage of the variety of questions offered and choose the 4 that best relate to them.”

Daria Williams, UC Irvine Admissions
How can students share their story?

As counselors and educators we want to help students find their own answers and then share their ‘voice’ in each response. In the Office of Admissions, we hope that students will share their life experiences with us in the UC application. We don’t want to limit their examples or impose a question on any student. It’s not about what we “want to hear” but instead on what the student wants to share, what they are comfortable sharing with a stranger in the admissions office.

Admissions readers are required to complete bias training every year. This means that a student can feel confident in sharing any topic with us, gender identity, substance abuse, learning disabilities, and more. We value the experience and what the student gained from the situation. We do not penalize a student for circumstances they lived through. Sharing their voice means that students talk to us in plain and direct manner.

Note the myth on the slide: “I have to respond to the questions in essay format”
This is false. Make note that the word essay is not a part of any PIQ webpage or worksheet. Style and structure are not a part of the review of a PIQ on any UC campus. Space is best allocated to content instead of an introduction paragraph or conclusion.
What is the personal insight question and what does admissions want from my response? A video from the University of California: https://youtu.be/7xi4O0jBntw
Deconstructing the Personal Insight Questions, page 1 of 4
What does each question really ask? Reviewing the questions and breaking them down will allow you to best advise your students when they share their responses with you. If your students don’t know where to start, these questions and comments may help them think information to share in their answers. Remember, the goal is for Admissions to learn about them (the student) from their (the student’s) perspective and in their (the student’s) own words.

**Question 1 – Leadership**
Reading the question, make note that we do not ask about leadership roles and we don’t set definitions of leaderships. The question asks if a student had an experience in which they stepped up and lead. We want to know what the student learned from the experience. We want to know if this experience was the catalyst for any of their future activities or accomplishments. When students share their leadership experience we want a brief overview. The focal point of the response is what was gained from the experience, not a step by step overview of the experience.

**Question 2 – Creativity**
The question gives a wide breathe of examples whereby a student can explore their creative side. What does the student define as their creative role or
outlet? Creativity should be explained but it does not have to be shown. If a student is talking about their creative outlet being web design we won’t click on a link to “see” that work. We don’t want a writing sample if the student is sharing creative writing as their answer to question 2.
Deconstructing the Personal Insight Questions, page 2 of 4
What does each question really ask? Reviewing the questions and breaking them down will allow you to best advise your students when they share their responses with you. If your students don’t know where to start, these questions and comments may help them think information to share in their answers. Remember, the goal is for Admissions to learn about them (the student) from their (the student’s) perspective and in their (the student’s) own words.

Question 3 – Talent or Skill
Talents come in many forms, academic and social to name a few. Students need to consider if their talent has manifested in the classroom or in an extracurricular activity. If it has and they already shared it in the UC application, how will a PIQ response enhance the information the admissions office has? As stated in other responses, we don’t define talent. We leave the definition of talent up to the student. Are they a blogger with 20K followers or is their talent baking? Once they identify the talent we need them to share how they have used the talent. The second half of the question states “how have you developed and demonstrated that talent over time?”

Question 4 – Opportunity and/or Barrier
What a student shares for this question can be a barrier, an opportunity or
both. When sharing a barrier, how did the student use their resources to overcome this barrier? If they share an opportunity, what was it and how did they grow from the experience. Opportunities and barriers are not mutually exclusive. For example, a student whose high school doesn’t offer ASL might find that as a barrier. Yet their local community college offers a dual enrollment program where they can take ASL is an opportunity to earn high school and college units.
Deconstructing the Personal Insight Questions, page 3 of 4
What does each question really ask? Reviewing the questions and breaking them down will allow you to best advise your students when they share their responses with you. If your students don’t know where to start, these questions and comments may help them think information to share in their answers. Remember, the goal is for Admissions to learn about them (the student) from their (the student’s) perspective and in their (the student’s) own words.

Question 5 – Challenge
When reviewing this question, help your student find the two requests. First, to identify the challenge and second to share how it impacted a students academic record. They need to share the “so what” factor here. Students who answer this question will want to make sure their challenge is briefly described or defined. A brief reminder, admissions readers cannot look up medical terminology and make assumptions about the severity of a disability or illness. Students need to explain their challenge, how it directly impacted THEM. The majority of the response needs to be on what they did despite the challenge or because of the challenge.

Question 6 – Academics
We want students to remember the a-g subjects. We think academics are
more than the core subjects of math, English and science. Students should reflect on what subject has sparked curiosity, a desire to explore, and learn. Common mistakes here are when students focus on a class and teacher instead of a subject. Ask the student to consider if the subject they are talking about has woven itself into their lives in extracurricular activities or hobbies.
Deconstructing the Personal Insight Questions, page 4 of 4

What does each question really ask? Reviewing the questions and breaking them down will allow you to best advise your students when they share their responses with you. If your students don’t know where to start, these questions and comments may help them think information to share in their answers. Remember, the goal is for Admissions to learn about them (the student) from their (the student’s) perspective and in their (the student’s) own words.

Question 7 – Better Place
When students break down the question, UC is asking students to identify a problem or situation that needed to be improved. What was that challenge/struggle/issue? While the question asks about their school or community, remind students that they get to set those definitions. Their community might be their volleyball team or their neighborhood. The improvement made by the student might have been done alone or in a group. If it was a group effort, the student needs to focus on what THEY did.

Question 8 – Stand Out
Please remind students that their common application answers should NOT be placed into a PIQ response. This question is asking “who are you?” and “what did admissions not ask you?” Looking closely at this question, the goal is for
the student to share **NEW** information. They need to review all seven sections of the application to see if anything needs to be explained or expanded on. Students should reflect on their life experiences, is there something about their academic or personal story which admissions needs to know. It might be everyday life to students but it can set CONTEXT to the office of admissions. As a reminder, the admissions reader is not looking for students to compare themselves with other students applying to UC. Lastly, the student does not need to share that they want to enroll on a UC campus, this is known since the student is applying to UC.
“Students should think of PIQs as interview questions and respond to them as such.”

Devon Bohart, UC Davis Admissions
How do students share their story, answer the UC PIQs?

Knowing what we are asking is step one to drafting a response. Students now need to think about **HOW** they share information in their PIQ answer. Students need to answer questions in their own voice. Admissions readers need to read it once and understand the information being shared by the student. We discourage students from looking at online examples for templates.

It is helpful if the student thinks of the PIQ's as their interview with Admissions. If the student has never had a job, they have seen interviews online in social media and through public posts. Interviews ask direct questions which give insight into a person's accomplishments. Interviews share talents that a person can bring to the organization. The student should frame their response as they would an interview answer. Ask students to focus on the content and not the style of writing.

The formatting in the UC application is often lost in translation. Text size, font, and formatting will conform the UC campus requirement regardless of what the student tries to do in the PIQ section of the application. Students should avoid special characters as those will be deleted or defaulted to empty space when downloaded on the UC campus.
Context and clarity are key in each UC PIQ response. It is important to remember though, there are only 350 words per response, so students should only include the most relevant details that help us understand them. Then, it is crucial that the applicant include a self-reflection on those details. Why are they sharing THIS information? How has it impacted who they are today? Is this information listed somewhere else in the application? Is the student repeating information or enhancing what was shared elsewhere? This component of the response will provide the insight as to the significance of this information.
How can students share their story, what works and what does not work in a PIQ?

Talking to the UC campuses, admissions readers share the following tips and recommendations.

What works:

• Examples and details are helpful. Examples should be recent (focused on events in high school) when possible. If students reflect on life before high school they will need to explain how that situation impacted them as a high school student.

• The student doesn’t need to add details which place the reader in the moment with them. We don’t need to know that it was Tuesday at 2:15pm when the blue skateboard they were riding hit a green shard of glass and caused a 40 degree angle turn of their front wheel. Details should be about the experience instead (example – ‘I fell off my skateboard and ended up in a foot cast for 3 months walking on crutches.’ The detail here is due to their fall they had three months on crutches.)

What does not work:

• It is important that students understand the purpose of these responses is for admissions readers to get to know them. Literary or descriptive language is not...
helpful in introducing the student to the stranger in admissions.

- Admissions readers cannot make assumptions about what they read. Therefore, flowery language, metaphors and analogies are not helpful since they create ambiguity.
- Quotes, lyrics and dialogue may not be the student's words, thus making them unnecessary as they often detract from the response.
- Students should avoid attempts to entertain or “hook” the reader and should instead use their own words to share their story and voice.
How can students share their story and explore their voice?

What does a good response look like? Let’s take a hypothetical example first: If a student was to respond to the leadership question, a student should not respond by simply stating that they were the team captain of the soccer team. This information should already be in the activities and awards section under their respective clubs and organizations.

We do not need 100 words about the green grass or the shiny soccer ball. What are the relevant fact, new information and context for a student’s accomplishments? For a student to truly make the most of their 350 word response, admissions readers want them to share how they became team captain, what skills they exhibited or learned in this role, examples of being successful as a leader, why this title is important to them, etc. Readers want to encourage students to take all their details and information and funnel them into a single clear response.
An example of a PIQ from a former UC applicant. How was it reviewed in admissions?

**PIQ Example: ACADEMIC SUBJECT THAT INSPIRES YOU**

As a young ballerina, I used to observe the older dancers’ feet and wonder how their entire body weight could be supported by the tips of their toes. I was unknowingly memorizing the anatomy that allowed me to perform on stage. My interest in the human body started with dance and continued in high school with courses like Human Anatomy. I was able to build upon the knowledge I had in dance class after years of ballet to support my classroom assignments. I began to understand the different muscles, bones, and organs that compose the body and also how their structure defines their functions. The more I learned about the body, the more questions I craved to have answered. Like pointe shoes supporting the dance, what other creations or technology can we combine to enhance a body - a dancers - performance? Biology allows me to make sense of the inner workings of my body, onstage and offstage. It fuels my determination to expand my understanding of dance.

The admissions officer will ask themselves the following questions.

- How does the student answer the question?
• Do they share a clear point or two of NEW information?
• Is this insight into the students major or career path?

The answer is yes to multiple questions above then this is a good response.
“Know your audience. Tailor the presentation to maximize a student’s response.”

Cuca Acosta, UC Santa Barbara Admissions
Know your audience. This is a guide to helping counselors with their PIQ workshops.

As you coordinate events with students, keep in mind that your presentation can change. Know your audience and adapt accordingly. Here are a few tips as you schedule one on one or group PIQ advising sessions.

Advising 1:1 – when working with a student individually, you can mimic the admissions experience. When the student submits an application to UC, the admissions reader will have access to the academic history section, which acts as their school transcript(s). The admissions reader will also have access to the students “activities and awards” tab, which acts as their resume/activities sheet. As such you should have a copy of their transcript and resume when you review a response. If possible, ask students to create a resume with no more than 20 items, ask them to limit their descriptions to 350 characters per activity. Depending on the time of year, a student may have this complete in the UC application; when possible ask the student to share this printout with you or to login so that you can view the details in the UC application.
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**Group Advising** – When you have a group of students working on a PIQ assignment it might be best to ask for peer reviews. You can encourage students to work in groups of two or three students. Students should be asked to read PIQ drafts for more than just general feeling. Instead of asking, “was this good?,” the student can focus on “what did you learn?” If a classmate or peer doesn’t learn about the student, then the admissions reader won’t either. What more should be looked at in a review of a PIQ? Think CCD: Clarity, Context and Depth.

- **Context**: what was available to the student?
- **Clarity**: what did the student take advantage of in this situation? Or what was not available to the student and WHY?
- **Depth**: what facts am I learning? (Example: I am 1 of 50 students in the choir but the only soprano)
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**Class Assignment** - When the PIQ’s are shared as a writing assignment, the teacher may or may not be focusing solely on the University of California’s questions. If this is an assignment, teachers are encouraged to break down each of the eight UC PIQ’s. The eight questions are available to students but they only have to answer four. Asking students to submit eight answers for a class project often is counterproductive. Students need to cross out or eliminate questions that they do not want to answer. Of the questions that remain (at least four) they should draft an answer. It’s important to reinforce that the admissions reader is NOT an English teacher. As such, admissions readers are not looking for grammar, style, structure, or vocabulary choice. If assignments grade content instead of structure it will mimic the admissions review and benefit the student in the long run.
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As you coordinate events with students, keep in mind that your presentation can change. Know your audience and adapt accordingly. Here are a few tips as you schedule one on one or group PIQ advising sessions.

**Online workshops and presentations** - Just a quick reminder, if you host PIQ sessions virtually there are many resources that are open to you which can help with advising a student. Breakout rooms are a great way to have small groups work together in a virtual environment. When peer review is offered, sharing live documents will allow for the addition of comments and suggestions.
“Students do not need to start their response with a catch phrase or quote. We want to hear their own voice, not someone else’s.”

Sandra Ponce, UCSC Admissions
Sharing major events and showcasing extraordinary circumstances

Regardless of where your students reside students may have been directly impacted for extraordinary circumstances (fires, floods, hurricanes, mass power outages, evacuations, homelessness, and more).

If students want to talk about a topics that is an extraordinary circumstance, encourage students to write about their personal experiences rather than comment/explain what they’ve seen on the news.

If students choose & feel comfortable talking about a significant event/extraordinary circumstance, they are encouraged to write about their personal experiences rather than comment/explain what they’ve seen on the news.

Myth: “I have to have or overcome a challenge for the UC to like my PIQ.”

False! The PIQ’s are a great place to share how you have grown through opportunities or experiences.

Remember, the UC application does not have a COVID question which students need to answer.
Sharing major events and showcasing extraordinary circumstances

Students who have experienced natural disasters i.e. wildfires, floods, storms, hurricanes, etc. will need to consider how they share their experience. If they share about these natural disasters they should be encouraged to write about the effects those events had on their own lives.

Those effects can be:

- Themselves or close family being severely ill. If it’s the illness of a family member, the answer should reflect on how that impacted the student.
- Financial hardships like unemployment, housing insecurities, etc.
- Remote learning challenges like access to internet or technology, affecting academics.

When it comes to major events like social justice movements, students can focus on their activism or involvement, whether it’s protests, boycotts, social/political campaigns, etc. Students can touch on their personal
experiences on the effects of racism, police brutality, immigration policies, etc. We welcome students self-reflection but we will ask, “why is this relevant to who the student is today?” What was tangible about the experience that created a point of action on the students behalf? Did these circumstances empower the student to act? Are the student considering a major or career based on these experiences?
Resources: PIQ links on individual campus pages
Various UC campus website have posted personal details on the PIQ’s. All share the same details but are branded with the individual UC campus. We share them with you as a point of reference.

UC Office of the President PIQ Overview

UC Berkeley Admissions PIQ

UC Davis PIQ Blog

UC Irvine First Year Student Page

UCLA Admissions PIQ
Resources: Webpages and admissions by campus
Various UC campus website have posted personal details on the PIQ’s. All share the same details but are branded with the individual UC campus. We share them with you as a point of reference.

UC Merced Admissions PIQ Tips

UC Santa Barbara Admissions Selection

UC San Diego Admissions
Resources: Handouts and Videos
The University of California Office of the President (UCOP) has created PIQ worksheets to help your students brainstorm answers. These are both in English and Spanish. Students can also watch videos on what the personal insight questions can and should be. We hope you will link these to your college webpages.

Worksheets:

**UC Personal Insight Questions PDF (English)**

**UC Personal Insight Questions PDF (Spanish)**

**UC San Diego PIQ Worksheet**
https://issuu.com/ucsandiego/docs/personal_insight?e=5498722/40042508

**VIDEO**

How to Answer the UC’s Personal Insight Questions
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7xi4OjBntw

UC Santa Barbara UC PIQ’s Overview
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gh4ycl9kzOc
Videos:
UC Office of the President: How to Answer the UC's Personal Insight Questions
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7xi4O0jBntw

UC Santa Barbara UC PIQs Overview
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gh4yci9kzOc
Thank you for your time. We hope these resources help you help your students.