

UC vs. CSU: What's the Difference?

UC vs CSU: they might have similar letters, but they're definitely *not* the same thing! The University of California and the California State University are two highly regarded public university systems based throughout California.

Whereas the UC system offers about 900 bachelor's degree programs, **the CSU system offers more than 2,700 bachelor's programs**. Obviously, what's available at each specific UC and CSU school will vary, so make sure to check ahead of time what majors and minors are offered at the UC and/or CSU schools you're considering.

You can look at [the list of UC majors by school here](#), and [the list of CSU majors by school here](#).

UC

The University of California system is a group of highly prestigious public research universities in California. Established in 1869, UC has grown to include over 280,000 students and 227,000 staff and faculty members.

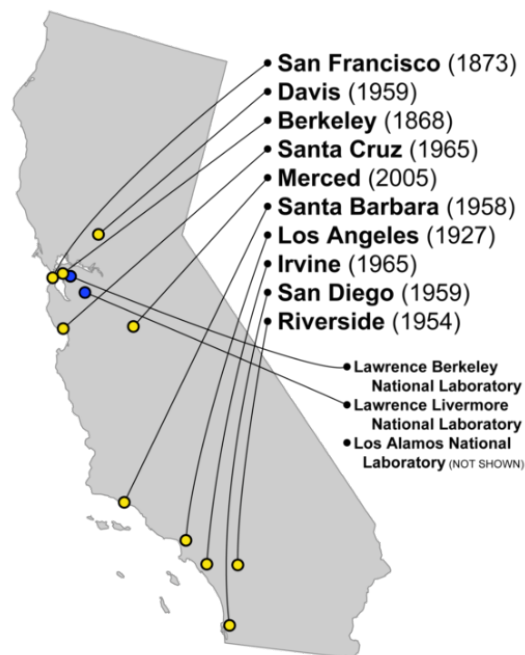
The UC schools are large schools, typically with 20,000 or more undergrads. UCLA has the biggest undergrad enrollment of the UC schools at 32,119, while UC Merced has the smallest enrollment at around 8,000 (it's also the newest of the UC schools, having opened its doors in 2005).

As a whole, the UC system offers 160 academic disciplines and 800 degree programs.

UC schools are highly regarded and top-ranked. They are extremely competitive to get into and are considered some of the best public universities in the nation.

Universities of California (UC's)
UC Berkeley
UC Davis
UC Irvine
UCLA

UC Merced
UC Riverside
UC San Diego
UC San Francisco*
UC Santa Barbara
UC Santa Cruz



CSU

The California State University system is a group of public universities based in California. It is the largest public four-year university system in the US.

Even though the CSU schools aren't nearly as competitive as the UC schools, they're still pretty popular because they offer quality academics at an affordable price for California residents.

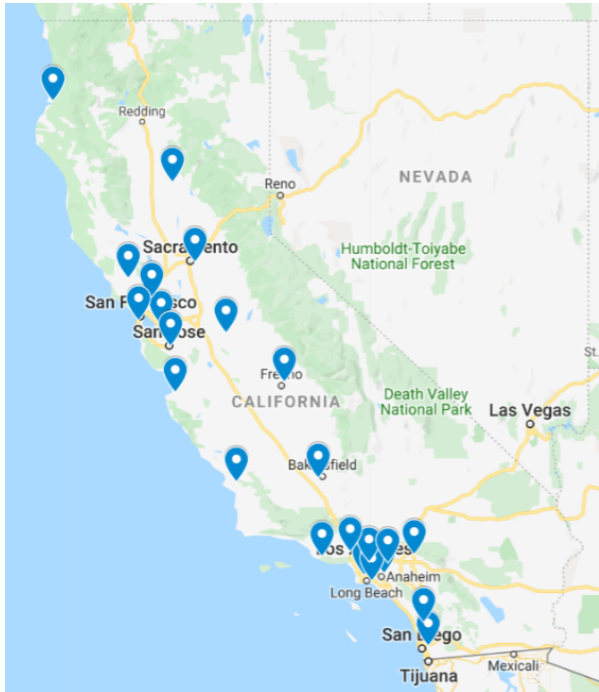
Officially established in 1972, the CSU system comprises 23 schools, which all have undergraduate programs available.

Additionally, CSU has an incredibly diverse student body, with a high percentage of non-traditional and commuter students, and is known for catering to minority and low-income students.

Unlike the UC schools, which focus more on research and academic publishing, CSU focuses more on helping students develop professional, practical skills that will lead them to great jobs right out of college.

California State Universities (CSU's)
<u>CSU Bakersfield</u>
<u>CSU Channel Islands</u>
<u>CSU Chico</u>
<u>CSU Dominguez Hills</u>
<u>CSU East Bay</u>
<u>CSU Fullerton</u>
<u>CSU Long Beach</u>
<u>CSU Monterey Bay</u>
<u>CSU Northridge</u>
<u>CSU San Bernardino</u>
<u>CSU San Marcos</u>
<u>Cal Maritime</u>
<u>Cal Poly Humboldt</u>
<u>Cal Poly Pomona</u>
<u>Cal Poly San Luis Obispo</u>
<u>Cal State LA</u>

Fresno State
Sacramento State
San Diego State
San Francisco State
San Jose State
Sonoma State
Stanislaus State



Comparison Chart

	University of California	California State University
Nickname(s)	UC	CSU, Cal State

Location	Mostly large cities in northern and southern California	Mix of small and large cities throughout California
Public or Private?	Public	Public
Total Enrollment	<u>294,662</u>	<u>477,466</u>
# of Campuses	9 + 1 graduate school	23
# of Bachelor's Programs	~900	~2,700
US News Ranking	Highest: UC Berkeley, UCLA (tie) #20 (Nat'l) Lowest: UC Merced, #97 (Nat'l)	Highest: Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, #2 (Regional West) Lowest: CSU East Bay, #331-440 (Nat'l)
Niche Grades	Highest: A+ (UCLA, UC Berkeley, UC Irvine) Lowest: B (UC Merced, UC Santa Cruz)	Highest: A- (Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, CSU Long Beach, San Diego State) Lowest: C+ (Humboldt State, Sonoma State)
Acceptance Rate	Highest: UC Merced, 87% Lowest: UCLA, 11%	Highest: CSU Fresno, 97% Lowest: Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, 33%
6-Year Graduation Rate	<u>86.3%</u>	<u>62.0%</u>
Gender Ratio	Female: 53% Male: 45% Unknown: <1%	Female: 58% Male: 42% Non-Binary: <1%

Ethnicity Breakdown	Asian: 31.4% Pacific Islander: .3% White: 22.9% Hispanic/Latinx: 22.2% International: 15.4% African American: 4.4% American Indian: .5% Unknown: 2.9%	Hispanic: 45% White, Non-Hispanic: 22% Asian American: 16% International Student: 5% Black/African American: 4% Two or More Races: 4% Unknown: 3% American Indian: <1% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander: <1%
Commuter Schools?	Not really, except for UC Irvine and UC Riverside	Yes, most campuses
Average Tuition & Fees	In-state: \$13,752 Out-of-state: \$46,326	In-state: \$5,742 Out-of-state: \$23,364
Overall Reputation	World-class public university system known for its premier academics, selectivity, and research	Very large, high-quality public university system known for its affordability and flexible class offerings

Acceptance Rates: (UC Schools are in Green)

School	Acceptance Rate
UCLA	11%
UC Berkeley	15%
UC Irvine	29%
UC Santa Barbara	29%
Cal Poly San Luis Obispo	33%
UC San Diego	34%
San Diego State	38%
CSU Long Beach	47%
UC Davis	49%
CSU Fullerton	59%

UC Santa Cruz	59%
Cal Poly Pomona	61%
UC Riverside	66%
CSU Northridge	73%
CSU East Bay	73%
CSU Channel Islands	79%
Cal Maritime	82%
San Jose State	84%
CSU Chico	85%
CSU Bakersfield	85%
UC Merced	87%
CSU Dominguez Hills	90%
Humboldt State	91%
CSU Los Angeles	91%
CSU San Bernardino	91%
San Francisco State	93%
CSU Monterey Bay	93%
CSU San Marcos	93%
CSU Sacramento	94%
CSU Stanislaus	94%
Sonoma State	94%
CSU Fresno	97%

Tuition and Fees

Since both the UC and CSU systems are public university systems, what you pay in tuition and fees will ultimately depend on whether you're a California resident or not. In-state tuition every year is \$5,742 at CSU and \$13,752 at UC. As you can see, **CSU is far cheaper to attend than a UC school—in fact, it's about \$8,000 cheaper!**

When it comes to out-of-state tuition and fees, these figures jump dramatically. At UC, out-of-state students must pay **\$46,326 per year**—over three times higher than what in-state students pay. By contrast, CSU charges tuition differently to out-of-state students, either by the semester unit (\$396 each) or by the quarter unit (\$264 each).

UC vs CSU: Which Schools Should You Apply To?

When it comes to Cal State vs UC, which schools should you apply to? Here are **four useful tips** to help you make your decision.

#1: Think About Size and Setting

Two big factors for many students are the size and overall location of the school.

With UC schools, most are on the larger end in terms of undergrad enrollment (with 20,000-40,000 students), whereas the CSU schools vary significantly, from as few as 1,000 undergrads to as many as 40,000.

If you're interested in having a smaller, more intimate student body, first **look at the CSU schools** before you consider any UC schools. If you'd prefer a more bustling environment, then feel free to look at pretty much all the UC schools (except UC Merced) and about half the CSU schools.

In terms of setting, location can vary a lot for both UC and CSU depending on the campus. It might help to remember, though, that UC schools are mostly based in larger cities, whereas CSU schools can be found in smaller cities as well as larger ones.

If you plan on commuting to school, keep in mind that larger cities might have worse traffic.

#2: Figure Out Your Academic Interests

Another factor to consider is your academic interests and what you want to major in (if you know).

UC and CSU schools don't all offer the same majors and minors, so you'll definitely have to do some research to see what kinds of programs each school offers and whether they have the ones you're interested in. You can do this by using [the list of UC majors](#) and [the list of CSU majors](#).

For example, a few CSU schools offer majors in apparel/fashion merchandising and management, whereas no UC schools offer any equivalent undergraduate program.

You might also want to **take into consideration whether your field has a better reputation at UC or CSU**. For example, [both UC Berkeley and UCLA have premier engineering programs](#), so you might want to prioritize applying to these schools if you're planning to be an engineering major.

#3: Consider Costs and Financial Aid

UC and CSU differ a lot in what they charge you for tuition and fees each year, so **make sure that you're fully aware of what you'll be responsible for paying**. Although it's clearly a lot cheaper to attend CSU instead of UC, **doing this might mean sacrificing quality of academics and overall prestige for affordability**.

Remember, too, that you'll need to consider financial aid packages. Despite UC's high cost, [55% of California undergrads at UC pay absolutely nothing in tuition](#). As for CSU, there are [tons of merit-based scholarships](#) you can apply for to try to save some money.

Whether you apply to UC schools, CSU schools, or a combination of the two, it'll be a smart idea to [look into external scholarships as well](#).

#4: Compare Your Academic Profile With Those of Admitted Students

Lastly, you'll need to consider your own academic profile—**that is, your GPA and advanced coursework**—and see how you compare with real admitted applicants to the UC and/or CSU schools you're looking at. Doing this should help you make an ideal college list that includes **a balanced number of safety schools, target schools, and reach schools**.

For example, if your GPA is about the same as those of admitted students to a particular UC or CSU school, then that institution can be considered a match, or target, school.

If your GPA and scores are higher, then that's a safety school, as you're very likely to get accepted.

Finally, if your GPA and test scores are significantly lower than the averages at a certain UC or CSU school, then that institution can be considered a reach school, as you're unlikely to get in with your current academic profile (but still could, of course).