



The University of California

Qualified Students Face an Inconsistent and Unfair Admissions System That Has Been Improperly Influenced by Relationships and Monetary Donations

Background

With nine campuses that offer undergraduate education, the University of California (university) is the State's most selective public postsecondary education system. Though its governing board, the University of California Board of Regents, adopts the admissions policies, each campus implements the policies and decides which applicants to admit to its campus. The Office of the President is the systemwide headquarters with authority over university operations and supports campuses' admissions and enrollment. Applicants must meet certain criteria to be admitted, and campuses select applicants for admission following a comprehensive review of each applicant's application. We audited the admissions activities at the campuses in Berkeley, Los Angeles, San Diego and Santa Barbara.

Key Recommendations

To ensure its admission practices are consistent and fair, we made many recommendations to the Office of the President, including the following:

- Require campuses to verify athletic talent and review donation records before admitting prospective student athletes for potential inappropriate activity; establish criteria for admitting applicants; and establish proficiency standards for application reviewers and monitor ratings for consistency.
- Oversee UC Berkeley's admissions process for at least three admissions cycles to ensure decisions are merit-based and free of improper influence.
- Regularly audit campuses' admissions processes to assess weaknesses, identify improprieties, and ensure improvements, and annually assess the ELC program to ensure maximum participation.

Key Findings

- Over a six-year period, campuses inappropriately admitted 64 wealthy and well-connected students as favors to donors, family, and friends and denied more qualified applicants educational opportunities.
 - » Campus staff falsely designated 22 applicants as student-athlete recruits because of donations from or as favors to well-connected families—campuses did not verify that applicants identified as student-athlete recruits were actually talented in the sport they purportedly played.
 - » One campus—UC Berkeley—admitted another 42 applicants through its regular admissions process based on connections to staff, leadership, and donors, and those applicants were not as qualified as others who were not admitted.
- Campuses do not have key criteria for selecting applicants for admission and supporting those decisions.
 - » Two campuses have often admitted applicants whom reviewers identified as less competitive while denying admission to applicants who were more highly recommended by their reviewers.
 - » Three campuses selected hundreds of applicants for admission who had not met eligibility requirements.
- Campuses insufficiently trained and supervised staff who review and rate applications which led to inconsistent reviews, and affected applicants' chances of admission. Further, because readers can see applicants' names, gender, and native languages on applications, applicants' ratings could be affected by implicit biases.
- The Office of the President has allowed weaknesses to persist for years and has not ensured the admissions policies and processes have been consistently and fairly applied from campus to campus.
 - » It has not established a minimum set of systemwide protocols and procedures to protect against impropriety, nor does it monitor or review campuses' admission practices.
 - » It has neglected a key program—Eligibility in the Local Context (ELC)—meant to improve university access for applicants from disadvantaged backgrounds.