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African American Student College Choice and the University of California Davis

By

EBONY E. LEWIS
DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

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of the

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

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African American Student College Choice and the University of California Davis

By Ebony E. Lewis

ABSTRACT

This study explores why African American first-year students admitted to the University of California Davis decline their offer of admissions. The objective is to help the University successfully achieve their goal of supporting greater diversity and representation of students from historically underrepresented minority communities and marginalized backgrounds, including African American students. This is also an effort to address the low representation of Black students in higher education nationally, through the close investigation of UC Davis—a top-tier Research 1 University with a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. This study is important because representation and access matters. The University of California (UC) has long expressed its commitment to enrolling a student body that reflects the state. UC Davis has also established similar diversity goals as part of its strategic plan, “To Boldly Go.” If we are to address barriers to access, we must understand what those barriers are, and also determine what students are looking for and what their needs and priorities are as they navigate through the college choice process by asking them. Adopting a mixed-methods approach, this study focused on the following research questions:

1. In what ways do the characteristics of African American first-year students admitted to UC Davis differ between those who submit an SIR and those who do not?
2. What are the experiences that influence whether African American first-year students admitted to UC Davis submit an SIR?

To address research question one, I conducted a quantitative analysis using existing administrative data on admission and enrollment by student characteristics as well as National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) data for first year African American students admitted to UC Davis in fall 2018. I compare the characteristics of admitted African American students who decide to enroll with those who decline their

admissions offer. To address research question two, I conducted semi-structured interviews with seven African American first-year students admitted to UC Davis for fall 2020 who declined their offer of admission. These interviews were conducted to document student narratives about college choice, and to better understand “the why” in their decision not to attend UC Davis.

The findings from this study will help inform institutional strategies, including recruiting and enrollment, about how to best support African American applicants considering UC Davis, particularly for Black students from the local region. Addressing enrollment growth will require an adjustment in strategy and collaborative efforts at all levels within and external to the University, including coordination with alumni, community-based organizations, schools, and other educational partners. Given this context, understanding why Black students who do gain admission to the University decide not to attend is crucial. This study also adds to the broader body of literature around student college choice, by highlighting the experience of African American students.

DEDICATION

I first give honor to my heavenly Father. I dedicate this to my parents – in loving memory of my Father, Daddy we did it. Mommie Honey, thank you for your love (sometimes tough) and support along this journey. I love you with all of my heart. We celebrate this together! To my family (ya'll know there are way too many to name) thank you for your encouragement and unconditional love. To the next generation, you've watched me take this journey and I want to encourage you to pursue your passions, whatever they may be. Know that you can achieve what others may say is impossible. Know that you belong. Know that we're here to support you. Now go get it!

To my village/community of support and church family near and far thank you for your love and prayers. In honor of all my elders who have gone on, I/we stand on your shoulders. To my mentors, those who have passed on (WAR thank you) and those who are still here, thank you for pouring into me. With God all things are possible. Thank you Lord! Philippians 4:13.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction and Purpose Statement

“The University of California does not care about Black students!” This was a statement presented to me in the early 2000s by a school counselor who was greatly concerned with the admission of their students to the University. Certainly, this could not be the case for a public university in the great state of California, but somehow this was the impression that a seasoned counselor had regarding their students’ ability to access the University. Was this the impression that other counselors had? Was this a widely shared perspective among students? Was this message being conveyed to students by other key influencers? Over the years, as an admissions professional I have continued to ponder what could have made a counselor believe this to be true, and also what influence this perspective had on the college choices of students in their care.

The University of California (UC) has long expressed its commitment to enrolling a student body that reflects the state. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, African Americans comprise approximately 6.5% of California’s population (United States Census Bureau, 2020)^[CBB] while undergraduate enrollment in the UC system has remained at 4% (University of California, 2020)^[CBB]. The University has also been constrained in using race-conscious admissions following the passage of a public referendum, namely Proposition 209, which implicated affirmative action policies. According to the 2018 UC Accountability Report as noted in appendix A, although the University has made progress overall in the enrollment of underrepresented minority students, it has not maintained pace with state demographics and the (University of California, 2018). In addition, in the 2016 report titled *Investing in California’s African American Students*, a research team of UC faculty members published a study on the college choices of African American freshman admits for fall 2015 across the entire UC system; they provided recommendations on ways in which UC can support diversity and inclusion to increase the enrollment of African American undergraduates (Contreras et al., 2015). The study found that many African American admits were greatly influenced by their perceptions of the campus climate and how welcoming an

institution appears to be. In addition, students were found to consider campus reputation and selectivity; many students not admitted to the most selective campuses, namely UC Berkeley and UCLA, chose to attend a campus outside of UC.

Purpose

My dissertation explores African American students who are admitted to UC Davis and then say no to their admissions offer. Specifically, I investigate the characteristics of these students and why they make the enrollment decisions they make. The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to understand the key factors that influence the decision of African American first-year applicants who are admitted to UC Davis and choose to decline their offer of admission. A convergent design method was used, in which both quantitative and qualitative data were collected roughly within the same timeframe, separately analyzed, and then merged, allowing for a comprehensive analysis of the research problem (Creswell, 2014). In this study, the quantitative data consisted of descriptive statistics gathered from pre-existing applicant data regarding student characteristics (e.g., race/ethnicity, first-generation [first-gen] college student, geographic location, school type, and socioeconomic status), as well as National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) data for determining where African American first-year admits who did not submit a Statement of Intent to Register (SIR) enrolled. Existing survey data of admitted students were also gathered to provide greater insight for identifying what similarities and differences exist among African American first-year admits who submit an SIR and those who do not. Qualitative data were collected through individual interviews, which documented student narratives to provide a better understanding of the factors that African American first-year students consider when determining if UC Davis is the right fit for them.

Collectively, this information will help inform institutional strategies about how to best support African American applicants considering UC Davis, including recruiting and enrollment, particularly for

Black students from the local region. As such, this study contributes to the broader body of literature around student college choice and UC.

Why is this Important?

There are many reasons why this area of research is important to pursue. First, according to the February 2019 report on the State of Higher Education, California has the fifth largest African American population ($N = 2.16$ million) in the country, with nearly three-fourths of its Black population residing in six of the state's 58 counties: Los Angeles (37%), San Bernardino (8%), Alameda (8%), San Diego (7%), and Sacramento (7%) (Campaign for College Opportunity, 2019). UC Davis, the focus of this study, is within 20 miles of one county and less than 70 miles of another, thus creating opportunities for increased engagement with students, families, and schools.

Second, access matters. African American enrollment at the University remains below the ethnic make-up of the state. While 6% of Blacks in California are considered college age (between 18 and 24 years) (Campaign for College Opportunity, 2019), African American undergraduate student enrollment at UC Davis and across the UC system has remained at just 4% (University of California, 2020). The Campaign for College Opportunity report highlighted an increase in the percentage of Black students who graduate high school having completed the minimum eligibility coursework required for UC and California State University (CSU) admission; yet, it also underscored a consistent gap in college preparation for Black students compared with White high school students. In addition, the study found that most Black students who attend college in California are disproportionately enrolled at California Community Colleges (i.e., at higher rates than at the public 4-year universities in the state).

Furthermore, UC has seen an overall decline in admit rates across ethnic backgrounds, primarily due to increased demand, as reflected in increasing applications and declining state support for expanding the enrollment capacity within the system. For Black students, UC admit rates are lower than those for other racial groups (Campaign for College Opportunity, 2019). In addition, according to

Governor Brown's 2015–16 Budget Summary, the "California population continues to grow in all large age groups, except college age" (California Department of Finance, 2015, p. 141), meaning that growth is now leveling off. Yet, even if the University was able to boost the percentage of minoritized students, such as African Americans, there would still be many unresolved issues of persistent inequality in K-12 education as well as broader issues of persistence and completion that require further attention. Another critical consideration is the aggressive and increased recruitment efforts of colleges and universities located outside of the state for California students.

Racial and socioeconomic disparities in education impact the pipeline of students being prepared for the University. In their article titled "Inequality: Underrepresentation of African American Males in U.S. Higher Education," Naylor et al. (2015) outlined the systemic challenge of institutional racism. Referencing critical race theory, the authors described how "the achievement gap and school dropout rates for Black males can be explained as a disparate impact of institutional racism manifested in the form of tracking and similar ability-group practices within public educational systems" (Naylor et al., 2015, p. 525). They provided a historical overview, beginning with African Americans not being allowed to access education in the early history of our country, to overcoming the hurdles of desegregation, white flight, and a disinvestment in public schools. Turning to more modern educational practices, they described how "tracking and ability grouping are yet additional forms of institutionalized racism because they effectively segregate students based on race, deny students an equal opportunity to a high-quality education, and leave an indelible mark on students' school experience and overall life chances" (Naylor et al., 2015, p. 526). Such practices have long-term impacts on educational preparation and access to higher education for African Americans as well as students from other underrepresented and marginalized communities.

In addition, the state must re-evaluate its investment within public education for students who are seeking a college degree. As outlined by Contreras (2015), the state made an initial investment in

student academic programs given their design to increase college access to disadvantaged students and develop the necessary partnerships in K-12 schools for increasing college readiness. However, the state's fiscal crises in the mid-2000s resulted in a significant reduction of funds, and enrollment growth among students of color has remained stagnant since the implementation of California's race-neutral policies (Contreras, et al., 2015). Addressing enrollment growth will require an adjustment in strategy and collaborative efforts at all levels within and external to the University, including coordination with alumni, community-based organizations, schools, and other educational partners. Given this context, understanding why Black students who do gain admission to the University decide not to attend is crucial.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

In this chapter, to better understand the enrollment decisions of African American students admitted to UC, I first review the literature on college choice, focusing – to the extent possible – on the choice process for African Americans. More specifically, I review the empirical literature regarding the processes and factors that have been determined to influence college choice processes. In addition, I establish the context for the study by offering a description of broader trends facing public higher education in the state of California. This review is divided into the categories presented in the following literature map:

1. Policy, Preparation, and Access
2. Foundational Study
3. Structural Issues Impacting Access to Minoritized Students
4. College Choice Themes
 - a. Campus climate and diversity
 - b. Cost and affordability
 - c. Outreach, campus visit, and engagement
 - d. High school context
 - e. Key influencers: family, peers, and community

The selected studies have all focused on student college choice and provided helpful insights into the various factors that influence student decisions regarding whether and where they apply and attend college. Of particular focus among the studies is the specific college choice process for African American students, as well as the critical role that parents play in the process. Overall, the studies have addressed student pathways from high school to 4-year college attendance, with some discussion around attendance at community college. Moreover, the studies have addressed the following five primary themes, which served as the focus for my literature review: (a) campus climate and diversity, (b) cost

and affordability, (c) outreach, campus visit, and engagement, (d) high school context, and (e) key influencers: family, peers, and community. This chapter also highlights the structural issues impacting access to UC for minoritized students.

Policy, Preparation, and Access: Prop 209 and the End of Affirmative Action in California Higher Education

Several of the reviewed studies have approached their research through any analysis of student perceptions, admissions trends, and outcomes following the passage and implementation of what has been defined as race-neutral policies in admissions. This is of significance as it relates to higher education in California. To provide greater context, Figure 1 presents a brief overview of UC and state policies surrounding admissions.

In the years immediately following the implementation of what has been defined as race-neutral policies in admissions, UC experienced an almost immediate decrease in the enrollment of underrepresented students. Figure 2 below provides a snapshot of underrepresented minority applicants, admits, and enrolled freshman between 1995 and 2002 from UC, taken from the March 2013 UC report on Undergraduate Access to the University of California After the Elimination of Race-Conscious Policies (University of California – Office of the President Student Academic Services, 2003). While we are years beyond the passage of this policy, it is crucial to understand whether the impacts found in previous studies are still present today within the context of how students perceive UC. My intent in this study was to lay the foundation for understanding how student perceptions of UC campuses have changed (or not) since the passage of Prop 209.

Smith and Fleming (2006) conducted a study focused on African American parental attitudes and perceptions around college choice in a post-209 era. This was also aligned with Teranishi and Briscoe (2008), who focused on student perceptions of UC immediately following the passage of Prop 209. Moreover, Contreras et al. (2015) made a foundational argument that there has been a “hyper-implementation of Proposition 209 over the past 20 years, where attempts to ensure diversity are under

strict scrutiny and UC campuses have moved further way from its public mission” to enroll the top 12.5% of high school graduates as part of the California Master Plan for higher education (Contreras, et al., 2015, p. 3). In contrast to the aforementioned three studies, Geiser and Kaspary (2005) explored the argument that UC’s admissions policies post-2009, implemented to diversify the undergraduate student make-up, have resulted in the admission of lower quality students by turning away more highly qualified students (Geiser & Kaspary, 2005, p. 396). Their results indicated that this was not the case; however, the implications of this policy regarding perceptions of the academic ability of African American students and other underrepresented communities of color are one means by which policy can and has shaped student perceptions of where they will go to college, and also whether they will enter a welcoming environment (or whether the campus climate will reflect the narrative that they somehow do not deserve to attend the University). Coupled with the policy discussion is the aspect of preparation and access to UC. I address this in the following section.

Figure 1

UC and California Policy Overview

July 1995 – The UC Regents adopted SP-1, “a resolution that prohibited the consideration of race, religion, sex, color, ethnicity, or national origin as criteria for admission to the University or to any program of study” along with SP-2, which implemented the same restriction on contracts and employment practices of the University (University of California Board of Regents, 2001).

November 1996 – California voters passed Prop 209 prohibiting the consideration of race, sex, color, ethnicity or national origin by state and local government institutions in the areas of public employment, public education, and public contracting. This policy was implemented as Article 1, Section 31 in the California constitution.¹

Fall 1998 – SP-1 and Prop 209 went into effect beginning with the review of applicants for the fall 1998 admissions cycle.

May 2001 – UC Regents policy 4401 was implemented, rescinding SP-1 and SP-2 given the University’s compliance with “Article 1, Section 31 of the California Constitution by treating all students equally in the admissions process without regard to their race, sex, color, ethnicity or national origin, and by treating employees and contractors similarly” (University of California Board of Regents, 2001) in compliance with Prop. 209.

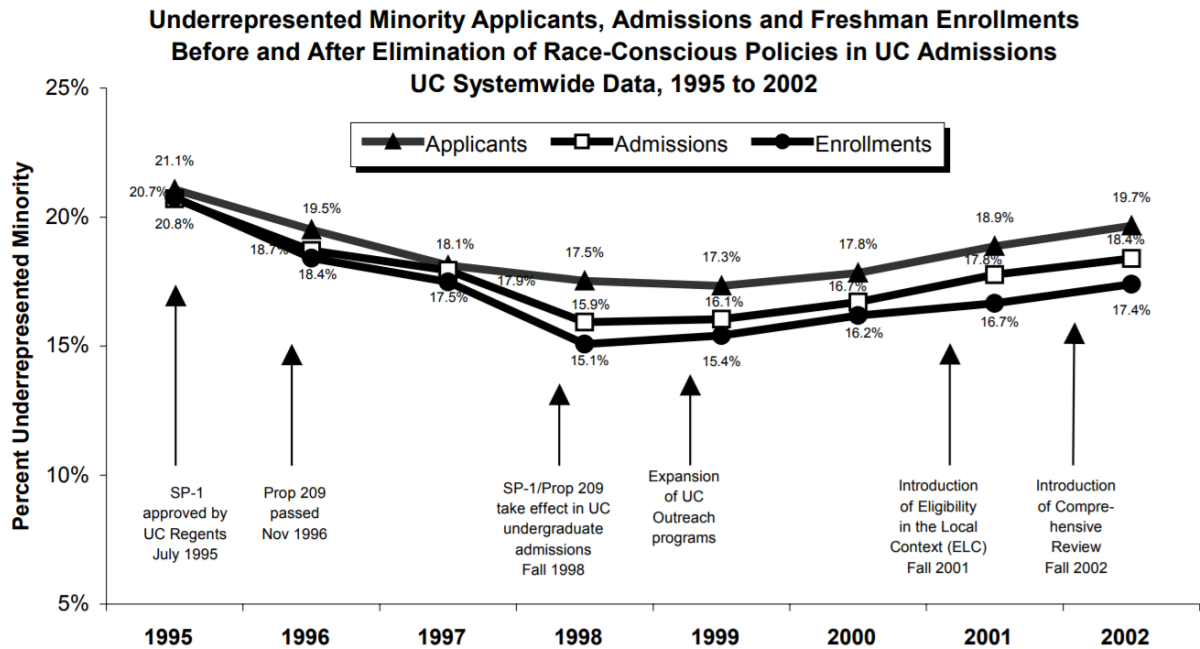
November 2001 – UC Regents policy 2104: Policy on Comprehensive Review in Undergraduate Admissions was approved for implementation in fall 2002, allowing undergraduate applications for admissions to be evaluated using multiple measures of achievement and considering a broader context that includes academic and nonacademic factors (University of California Board of Regents, 2001).

January 2011 – UC Regents policy 2108: Resolution Regarding Individualized Review and Holistic Evaluation in Undergraduate Admissions was approved, which was focused on achieving inclusiveness and excellence among the undergraduate student body through the implementation of an application review process known as holistic review, a form of comprehensive review. In this process, trained human readers “examine the entire application in considering personal achievements, challenges, leadership, and contributions to applicants’ communities alongside context information” (University of California Board of Regents, 2011) and produce a single holistic score based on a thorough review of all information provided in each application. Campuses began implementation for the fall 2012 admissions cycle.

¹https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?lawCode=CONS§ionNum=SEC.%2031.&article=I

Figure 2

March 2013 UC Report on UC report on Undergraduate Access



Note: Underrepresented minorities are American Indian, African American, Chicano, or Latino students. Following longstanding UC reporting practices, URM percentages have been calculated as a fraction of all fall first-time freshman domestic students. This will result in minor differences with other UC publications that report on CA resident students only.

Foundational Study: Investing in California's African American Students

Before reviewing the broader findings from the literature review, I first summarize a foundational study upon which my work builds, namely *Investing in California's African American students: College choice, diversity & exclusion* by Contreras et al. (2015). Said study was funded by the UC Office of the President and the UC Council of Vice Chancellors for Student Affairs. It focused on understanding the reasons why African American first-year students admitted to the UC system chose not to attend. Brief descriptions of the research question, methods, and main findings of the study are provided as follows.

The stated purpose of the study was to conduct a “statewide examination of the college admissions and choice process as experienced by African American students admitted to the UC system for the fall 2015 admissions cycle” (Contreras, et al., 2015, p. 3). The authors set out to understand the differences between African American first-year students admitted in fall 2015 to a UC campus that accepted their offer of admissions and those that did not. They further assessed the college choice process and perspectives of the admitted students who did not accept their offer of admission.

Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, the study consisted of a survey, individual interviews, and parent focus groups. Utilizing a convergent method, the researchers first distributed a survey to all 3,402 African American first-year students admitted to a UC campus, of which 710 students completed the survey, including 558 California residents. The survey was administered between August and October 2015. Simultaneously, between August and December 2015, individual interviews were conducted among African American admits from different regions of California who were admitted for fall 2015 and opted to attend a non-UC campus. Emphasis was placed on students from the following cities and regions within the state: Los Angeles, the Oakland/Bay Area region, Sacramento, Inland Empire, and San Diego. The researchers set a goal of interviewing 60 students and were able to conduct

interviews with 74 students. In addition, to better understand family perceptions, the study included two focus groups that consisted of 12 parents of admitted African American first-year students.

The main findings from the study were categorized into five themes: Access, Diversity and Climate, Affordability, Outreach, and High School Context.

- **Access related to campus selectivity** was an influence on student college choice. Students who did not get into their first choice, which was often one of the most selective UC campuses (UCLA and UC Berkeley), often opted to attend a college outside of the UC system.
- **Perceptions of the campus climate** not being welcoming, as well as low enrollment of undergraduate African American students, played key roles for students who decided not to go to UC. This was more important in many instances than proximity to family. Regarding campus climate, students also expressed concerns of alienation and exclusion based on low enrollment numbers. Whether perceived or real, this played a large part.
- **Affordability** was another theme; again, real or perceived, there was an idea that the immediate cost was quite high and the way UC campuses presented their financial aid packages did not seem to appeal to students in a way that addressed their desires to keep their loan debt low. Students' analysis and understanding of the financial process reflected a hesitation toward taking out any student loans, and they opted for what they perceived to be less expensive options at a CSU or community college. Others accepted offers at Ivy League schools that provided more options in terms of scholarships.
- **Outreach** in this study included direct recruitment and outreach through educational preparation programs. Students reported having little or no interaction with admissions recruiters, including students who participated in UC sponsored outreach programs such as the Early Academic Outreach Program (EAOP). Students were also seeking more affirmation from

UC that African American students were wanted and welcome and this lack of interaction sent the opposite message.

- **High School Context** was the final theme, and the most crucial takeaway was the large role that teachers played in students' college choice process. In most instances, students talked to their teachers even more than their counselors. When they did talk to their counselors, they received technical support regarding the process of completing and submitting the application, but students reported that their counselors knew very little about actual campuses as it related to the major, climate, and other important factors such as financial aid. The students were left to research this information on their own.

While this study highlighted some key observations for UC, other studies have examined how African American students decide where to attend college, as well as whom and/or what key factors influence the students' decision. Among these various studies, several themes align with the study of Contreras et al. (2015) and shed additional light on the choice process for students. I synthesized the key findings in these empirical studies, as outlined in the following section. Before proceeding to these themes, however, I first set the stage in terms of key studies that provide context regarding the higher education landscape in California with the end of Affirmative Action.

Structural Issues Impacting Access to UC for Minoritized Students: Demographic Trends of UC Eligible Students

In terms of preparation, Silver et al. (2017) and Freeman (1999) can also be contrasted from the lens of college-going rates of African American students compared with who is eligible for admission to UC and the California State University systems. In Freeman's (1999) examination of race and culture within the context of college choice, she explored why African American high school students decide whether to pursue higher education. At the time of her study (now nearly two decades ago), she found that there was a decline in interest in pursuing postsecondary education among Black high school students. Silver

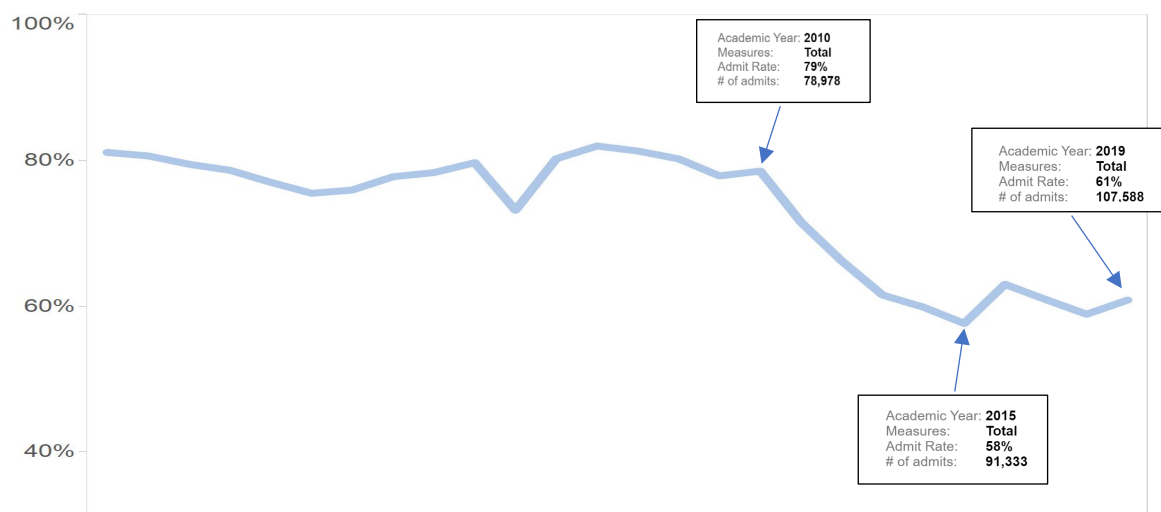
et al. (2017) examined UC and CSU eligibility among California high school students and found that while an increase in the number of seniors becoming UC eligible had occurred, there were still disparities around African American and Latinx students. Similar to Freeman (1999), Silver et al. (2017) described how overall UC eligibility rates were similar to those in previous years, yet eligibility rates for Latino and African American graduates continued to be lower than those of White and Asian graduates, thus revealing a disparity that UC and CSU must still address (Silver et al., 2017). In providing information for counselors regarding the minimum requirements for freshman admissions, UC's freshman admissions website underscores the importance of counselors conveying to their students that "meeting the minimum requirements does not guarantee admission to a particular campus. Often, admission to our campuses and/or programs is extremely competitive and requires students to satisfy far more demanding standards" (University of California, 2019). As displayed in Figure 3 below, the UC system has become more selective, moving from a 79% freshman admit rate in fall 2010 to a 61% admit rate for fall 2019. Since meeting minimum eligibility does not equate to being admitted to the UC or CSU campus of a student's choice, more analysis is required around how these disparities influence student perceptions of going to college and being admitted to a UC or CSU campus.

Although more students are becoming eligible for admission, Gao and Johnson (2017) found that students in California are falling off the pathway to college and the pathway to completion of their degree, as evidenced through the percentage of 9th grade students who ultimately earn a bachelor's degree, which is only 30% (Gao & Johnson, 2017). Of the 70% who do not obtain a bachelor's degree, 51% either do not finish high school or graduate from high school but do not enroll in college, while another 49% do enroll in a 2- or 4-year college but do not transfer or earn their 4-year degree (Gao & Johnson, 2017). In an economy that has an increasing demand for more workers who are highly educated, the rate of college graduates in the state is insufficient. The idea of closing the preparation gap is worthy of further exploration as this study found that the majority of California students are not

prepared for high school, which is in direct contrast to the increase in UC eligibility, which is entirely focused on college preparation. Low-income and historically underrepresented minority students are more likely to enroll at a community college, and problems with progression are directly correlated with a-g completion and racial disparities (Gao & Johnson, 2017). Eliminating such problems would serve to increase the number of a-g courses completed as well as help to remedy some of the disparities found. College preparation in high school is important and needed.

Figure 3

UC Freshman Admit Rates



(University of California, 2020)

College Choice Themes

Campus Climate and Diversity – Sense of Belonging

Contreras et al. (2015) focused on the college choice process for African American freshmen who were admitted to at least one UC campus for fall 2015 as well as those who decided to enroll at a college/university outside of the UC system. Similarly, although 7 years previously, Teranishi and Briscoe (2008) asserted that no detailed examination had been performed on how student perceptions changed and were influenced by the elimination of affirmative action. They hypothesized that at the search stage of the college choice process, many high-achieving, college-bound Black students chose to apply to other competitive colleges and universities in the wake of Prop 209. The outcomes of Contreras et al. (2015) pointed to a similar conclusion, although at the choice stage in which a number of African American students who did apply and were admitted to UC attended other non-UC campuses, particularly if they did not get into their first choice. Much of this had to do with the students' perception of the UC system considering the passage of Prop 209, and also how the students believed others perceive them. Related to a sense of belonging, some students had a perception of the campus climate being hostile and unwelcoming (Teranishi & Briscoe, 2008). Regarding a sense of belonging and cultural awareness, the students studied by Freeman (1999) expressed a clear need for more cultural awareness in their current schooling, which motivated African American students to pursue higher education. This included a need for more integration of culturally relevant topics and information into the curriculum. In this qualitative study, 16 group interviews were conducted with 70 African American high school students in the 10th–12th grades within five cities in the US with large African American populations – Atlanta, Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, and Washington, D.C. The study addressed how African American high school students' perceptions of race factored into their decision to participate (or not) in higher education (Freeman, 1999). The study included students from public inner-city schools as well as private/independent schools. Most participants were first-gen with none of their parents having

obtained a college degree. The socioeconomic background of participants varied, with many students from inner-city schools being lower-income and some private/independent school attendees on scholarships. The overall findings revealed that race played a significant role in student perceptions of African American students' choice to pursue higher education.

Geiser and Kaspary (2005) discussed perceptions of "the symbolic message that SP-1 and Proposition 209 sent to underrepresented minorities, many of whom may have come to view UC as less welcoming than in the past" (Geiser & Kaspary, 2005, p. 401). Teranishi and Briscoe (2008) also underscored ways in which students coped with perceptions of not feeling welcome by creating their own safe spaces, and also by seeking admission elsewhere outside of UC, including CSU campuses, historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), and private colleges.

Student Perceptions

Throughout the literature, another key theme that surfaced was the role that key influencers played in impacting African Americans' college choice. Smith and Fleming (2016) indicated how traditional college choice theory from the 1970s to the 1990s was framed and developed within the context of White student perspectives and experiences as well as those of White parents. They underscored that a need exists to examine communities of color as well as across socioeconomic diversity to better understand how students from other communities make their decisions about where to go to college (Smith & Fleming, 2006). There was also a theme of hopelessness or loss of hope; interestingly, the students who attended private school had a perception that their peers at public school were intimidated by the idea of going to college, even when the public high school students may not have expressed that themselves (Freeman, 1999). The college choice and aspirations of African American students were explored by Smith and Fleming as well as Contreras et al. (2015). In the latter study, students who did not get into their first choice, which was often one of the most selective UC campuses, often opted to attend a college outside of the UC system. In connection with broader social

capital theory, this can be connected to the information, resources, and social networks that students have access to. In a study titled “Social Capital and College Planning,” Raquel L. Farmer-Hinton (2008) conducted an analysis of school-based resources and support systems that students of color found helpful, and discovered that students primarily received encouragement to attend college from parents and family members. For first-gen students of color, however, the main source of support for college guidance and planning must come from their schools given the limited information that their parents and relatives may have.

Teranishi and Briscoe (2006) addressed social capital and racial stratification related to access to college information, resources, and knowledge. They underscored the importance of integrating social network theory into the narrative regarding student college choice as it has a primary focus on “the lack of access to influential and important resources for college access and degree attainment for racial and ethnic minority students, [which] can help to understand the ways race influences how students perceive and interact with various agents within their networks” (Teranishi & Briscoe, 2006, p. 593). According to Coleman (1988), social capital serves as a signal “that something of value has been produced for those actors who have this resource available and that the value depends on social organization” (Coleman, 1988). Both theories can be utilized to help understand why African American students in the studies cited may have opted out of attending a UC campus if not admitted to UCB or UCLA, due to their limited networks that either provide access to people, resources, information, and social norms, which would expand their consideration of other UC campuses. It can also be determined that existing social capital can also influence students to consider other institutions of higher education as alternatives.

High School Context

Another theme found in the various studies reviewed was a connection between students’ perception about their own preparation and what opportunities are available to them. The students in

Freeman's study (1999) ranged from grades 10 to 12 and attended a cross-section of school types that included magnet, suburban, private, and inner-city schools. In response to why there was a decline in the number of African Americans considering engaging in higher education, students outlined how college was not presented to them as an option due to what Freeman described as psychological or social barriers, such as "not being pushed by parents or by school personnel and generally not receiving encouragement from anyone" (Freeman, 1999, p. 19). Students saw themselves as their own motivators. Most of the students were first-gen students and expressed how there was no one there to help or inspire them to pursue higher education. Family or extended family were supportive of students surpassing their accomplishments, but there was a lack of practical support to help students navigate the college process. The students expressed a clear need for there to be more cultural awareness in their current schooling, which would motivate African American students to pursue higher education.

In the study of Contreras (2015), the high school counselors were a central resource in terms of obtaining admissions and financial aid information/paperwork. However, students shared that their counselors had limited information about the respective campuses. This highlighted a need to ensure that counselors have more direct exposure to and understanding of other colleges/universities to best advise students. In addition to counselors, high school teachers played a key role and were a resource from whom students often sought information. Along socioeconomic lines, students who were more affluent frequently relied on family and other key influencers, whereas students with fewer resources relied more on counseling support and outreach programs serving their schools. In conjunction, the students studied by Teranishi and Briscoe (2008) expressed a lack of confidence in their ability to be admitted, which was influenced for many students by their counselors, who discouraged them from attending UC. For example, when students were asked why they had the perception that UC was so selective, "many students responded by saying that the college counselors were the ones who had informed them that the system, as a whole, was highly selective and, likely, out of the range of

opportunity for them” (Teranishi & Briscoe, 2008, p. 20). One student in the study shared how their counselor said that UC does not welcome Black students as is reflected in its policy of removing Affirmative Action. An important reminder is that the interviews for this study were conducted in the fall of 1998 (shortly after the passage of Prop 209 and the first fall in which UC’s new race-neutral policies were implemented). This was among Black high school juniors and seniors enrolled at predominantly Black public schools in Los Angeles (LA), which historically had high rates of sending applicants, admits, and enrollees to UC. While not explicitly stated, the question arises of how much students’ lack of confidence comes from messages conveyed by policies and outside influencers.

Teranishi and Briscoe (2008) spoke directly to and even referenced Freeman’s work, as it related to scholarship focused on “how racial difference informs student choice” (Teranishi & Briscoe, 2008, p. 17). They used Freeman’s work as an example because she focused on “the ways in which Black students from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds perceive and interpret barriers to attending college” (Teranishi & Briscoe, 2008, p. 17). Several of these studies have used a critical race theory (CRT) lens to better understand and capture the college choice process for communities of color. Due to cultural differences, customs, and norms, communities of color may prioritize differently when determining where to attend college.

One gap in the literature on African American student college choice is the role that programs outside of schools, such as community-based organizations and outreach/academic preparation programs play within the school context in terms of where African American students choose to apply. Often there are programs that work with high schools and districts, although they are not part of the formal school structure. Results from Martinez et al. (2018) supported the positive impact of academic preparation programs such as Upward Bound, along with program enhancements that can be made to address undermatching. This refers to students not applying to more selective campuses in which they would be competitive applicants, in part because they do not perceive themselves as being competitive

enough to be admitted (Martinez et al., 2018). In this study, Upward Bound programs implemented an initiative called Find the Fit, which consisted of three components: (a) providing student participants with personalized folders with materials tailored to their college preparation; (b) sending customized text and email messages to students to provide information aligned with where they were applying; and (c) providing webinars for Upward Bound counselors to support their training. The study found that there was an increase in the number of colleges that students applied to along with an increase in the selectivity of the colleges and Universities. This leads into the next theme regarding college match.

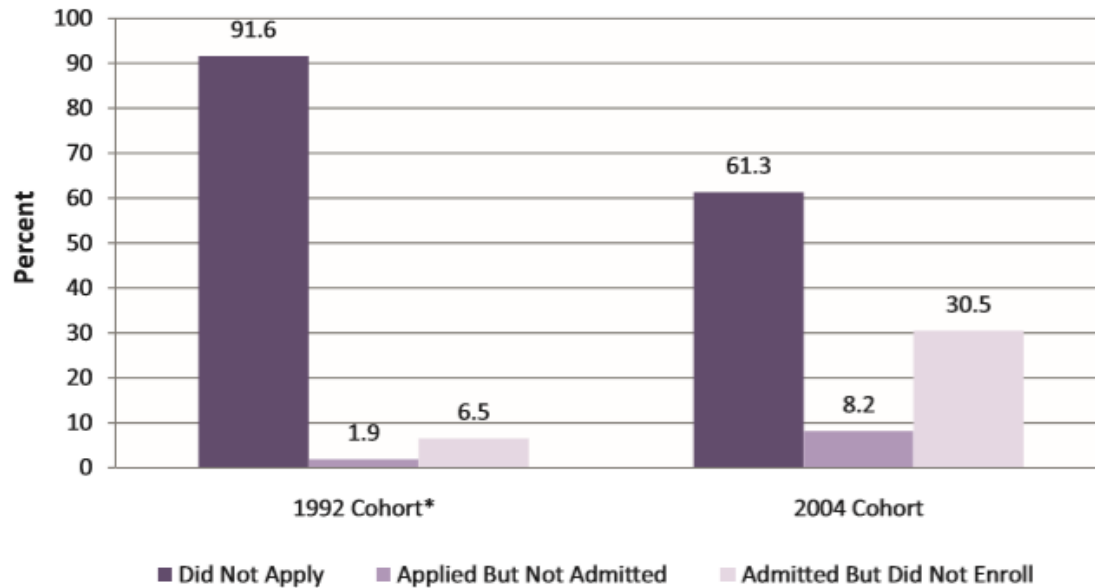
Academic Reputation and College Match

Although academic reputation was not explicitly stated by Contreras et al. (2015), the trend of many African American students choosing to attend a non-UC campus if they were not admitted to the two most selective campuses certainly implied a perception regarding what these two campuses offer that others do not. Teranishi and Briscoe (2008) found that students had limited knowledge of the UC system and opportunities beyond UC Berkeley and UCLA, and that they saw increased selection by other campuses as a barrier to access. This is an interesting observation given that UCLA and UC Berkeley are the most selective campuses in terms of admissions rates. These campuses also had the highest profile among the nine undergraduate campuses and, based on various studies (e.g., Teranishi & Briscoe, 2008; Contreras et al., 2015), were the only true choices for African American students, to the extent that many students would not consider other UC campuses if they were not admitted to UCLA or UCB. For example, in fall 2019, UCB admitted 16.4% of its freshman applicants while UCLA only admitted 12.4%, compared with 32.3% at UC San Diego (UCSD) and 39.1% at UCD (University of California Admissions, 2020). There may certainly be additional explanations, such as costs, scholarships, and competition with other highly selective institutions across the nation. Another explanation, and one on which extensive research exists, is the idea of student–college match.

Smith et al. (2013) aimed to determine and quantify the extent to which student–college academic undermatch occurs. Academic undermatch occurs when a student has the academic qualifications that would allow them access as a competitive applicant to a more selective college/university than the one they have decided to attend. The authors conducted an analysis of two nationally represented samples of high school senior cohorts between 1994 and 2004 using data acquired from the 1998 National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) and the 2002 Educational Longitudinal Study (ELS). The authors determined academic undermatch through a comparison between the most selective university where a student would be competitive to attend based on their academic profile and the institution where they ultimately enrolled, according to the following institution types that students were determined to have access to: Very Selective (Most Competitive, Highly Competitive); Selective (Very competitive); Somewhat Selective (Competitive); Nonselective (Less Competitive, Noncompetitive); Two-Year College; or No College (Smith et al., 2013, p. 250). The study found that at each level of access, low-SES students had higher rates of undermatch. For example, higher-SES students undermatched at a rate of 34% compared with 49.6% for lower-SES students (Smith et al., 2013). Students who had access to the most selective institutions matched at a 58.5% rate with an overall undermatch rate of 41.5%. Overall, the study found that more than 40% of students undermatched, and while some students enrolled at an institution just below their matched institution type, they often undermatched at a rate substantially below their academic achievements. Additionally, a significantly high percentage of students undermatched by not applying to schools that aligned with their academic credentials, as reflected in Figure 4 below.

Figure 4

Academic undermatching in the college-going process by cohort and parental education



(Smith et al., 2013, p. 259).

In addition, male students were more likely to undermatch than female students, and Asian, Black, and Latinx students were less likely to undermatch than their White counterparts. First-gen students also undermatched at a higher rate than those whose parents had a college degree. This is aligned with the findings of Martinez et al. (2018), who found that the Find the Fit initiative addressed undermatching at the applicant stage for participants, but it did not shift the importance level that students placed on the academic quality of the institutions they applied to. In addition, Smith et al. (2013) found that students whose academic credentials aligned with nonselective institutions tended to overmatch at somewhat selective and selective colleges by 37.4% and 21.5%, respectively. However, they also tended to undermatch and enroll in a 2-year college at a rate of approximately 21%. Beyond undermatching, by not applying, students also undermatched by not enrolling at an institution at which they were admitted. This is the area that I addressed in the present study.

Key Influencers: Family, Peers, and Community

This section discusses where students obtain their information and support from in terms of the role of parents and families. Smith and Fleming (2016) argued that there is a noticeable imbalance in undergraduate student enrollment, where African American women enrolled in higher education far outnumber African American men. There has been little research on the key influencers of this trend in the role that parents play in African American male/female college enrollment, and on how this gender imbalance may impact the overall experience of African American women and men enrolled at predominantly White institutions (PWIs) (Smith & Fleming, 2006). The authors operationalized their key constructs by exploring the ways in which the involvement of urban African American parents in college choice was consistent through the three activities theorized by Hossler, namely setting aspirations, support, and encouragement, and how this differed for daughters compared with sons (Smith & Fleming, 2006). What they found was that the environmental factors described by Alvarez (2015) significantly influenced the concerns that African American parents had regarding the future of their sons as Black men in America, a society that the parents viewed as being unforgiving and callous toward Black males. Aligned with this, they worried about their sons being lost to the criminal justice system. One parent shared their theory that the growth and privatization of prisons in California were not coincidental, and that higher education was intentionally less accessible for underrepresented students as many stood to profit from the incarceration of Black and Latinx males (Smith & Fleming, 2006). By contrast, the key concerns parents had for their daughters concerned being self-reliant (i.e., not having to depend on others to take care of themselves). This aligns with Alvarez's self-sufficiency variable. How well will daughters be able to take care of themselves away from college? How will obtaining a 4-year degree position African American women to care for themselves? Many of the mothers in the study of Smith and Fleming (2006) shared their own negative experiences and stories regarding the adverse impacts of being dependent on others; the authors described how "they raised their daughters to

become academic achievers to gain personal and financial independence” (Smith & Fleming, 2006, p. 85). In both studies, parents and students undertook risk assessments along the college timeline as they used negotiation variables “to determine their actions and behaviors in relation to college planning and attendance” (Alvarez, 2015, p. 58). Furthermore, in both studies, parents were worried about their children’s physical well-being.

The influences of family and one’s own self were found by Freeman (1999), beginning in the predisposition stage, where most of the students in the study shared that college was never presented to them as an option. Furthermore, they did not have friends who were interested in going to college and expressed how there was no one there to help or inspire them. Another example is found in the study of Cabrera (2016), where the results indicated that for Native American students considering the University of Arizona, predisposition ideologies regarding where a student will attend college were often influenced and formed by the family, particularly for first-gen students. Griffin et al. (2012) studied the college choice process of Black immigrants (i.e., students from the African diaspora who are first- or second-generation immigrants from Africa, the Caribbean, or other territories such as Haiti) and found that the parental role was a critical influence at every stage of Hossler and Gallagher’s (1987) college choice process. Along with traditional college choice theory, which was part of the researchers’ theoretical framework, the study was also grounded in habitus, or the ways in which people make choices based on what is determined to be appropriate within their culture or among the community that they identify with. For Black immigrants, high value was placed on education linked to the success of the student along with the future success of the family being directly associated with college attendance. Students wished to support their family, including their parents who were more affluent in their home country than when they moved to the United States.

Associated with this, institutional prestige was a critical influencer at the search stage. Students’ choice sets included institutions that others viewed as elite, such as Brown, Cornell, UCB, and

Dartmouth. Those applying to HBCUs applied to more well-known and prestigious campuses such as Morehouse, Hampton, Spelman, and Howard (Griffin et al., 2012). Student participants made the connection that having African parents meant the expectation to go to college. This included a cultural expectation of being children of African immigrants. Whether it was popular among their peers or not, the only acceptable option for African parents was for their children to obtain strong grades that met college eligibility requirements and led to success in college. Their perception was that African American parents did not have the same level of expectations for their students. Participants in the study also described education as a privilege in the context that education is not as accessible and does not come as easily in other countries (Griffin et al., 2012). Beyond parents and families, Farmer-Hinton (2008) pointed to school staff such as counselors and teachers playing a key role in students' decisions of where to apply and enroll, and students seeking out staff members for guidance regarding where they should make their final choice to enroll (Farmer-Hinton, 2008). Through one-on-one meetings with counselors and teachers, students were pushed to think critically about where they want to enroll. Finally, Palardy (2015) explored the College Choice Organizational Habitus (CCOH) or the "collective sensibilities, preferences, and values of the school regarding post-secondary education" (Palardy, 2015, p. 332) by measuring the attitudes of peers, family, and students and the influence that had on where students chose to attend college. He found that the socioeconomic composition (SEC) of the school's student body served as a proxy for student college-going rates. The higher the SEC, the greater the likelihood that students attended college after high school graduation. Students from higher-SEC schools also "enrolled in selective colleges at approximately 4 times the rate of their low-SEC counterparts" (Palardy, 2015, p. 341). Additionally, peer attitudes about college were also shaped by school demographics.

Cost and Affordability

Student perceptions about cost are a key theme in several of the reviewed studies, including that of Alvarez (2015). There appears to be a lack of understanding by students and families, and

perhaps a lack of effective communication on the part of the universities, regarding costs, the financial aid process, and interpreting the financial aid offer. In the study of Contreras (2015), the idea of affordability as well as students' perceptions and understanding of the financial process reflected a hesitation toward taking out any student loans. Rather, students opted for what they perceived to be less expensive options at a CSU or community college. Others accepted offers at Ivy League schools that provided more options in terms of scholarships (Contreras et al., 2015). Furthermore, financial literacy and clarity surrounding cost and how to pay for college are critical not only for students but also for their parents and families. For example, as important as prestige was to the students and families in the study of Griffin et al. (2012), financial resources were of greater importance. The SES of many Black immigrant families was much higher before they immigrated to the U.S. As such, degree attainment was of the upmost importance. In one instance, a student was encouraged by their mother and grandmother to pass on attending an Ivy league institution to avoid having to take out loans. For another student, their parents prioritized going to the school that offered the best financial aid package. Yet, another student prioritized scholarships as being of the upmost importance as they did not want to be an additional burden to their families.

Outreach, Campus Visit, and Engagement

Cabrera's (2016) results underscored the importance of the campus visit and tour, which influenced both the predisposition stage in terms of Native American students' interest in going to college, and ultimately where students decide to enroll. Espinosa et al. (2015) conducted a large-scale national survey of leaders in admissions and enrollment management to share practices and strategic approaches that their universities are taking and/or considering to diversify their incoming class of undergraduate students. One fundamental step in admitting a strong freshman class is building a strong and diverse applicant pool, which is the focus of the fall cycle. For the vast majority of respondents, four diversity strategies were consistently prioritized: targeted recruitment and outreach to historically

underrepresented minority (URM) students, enhanced recruitment of community college transfers, targeted recruitment of low-income and first-generation students, and the establishment of articulation agreements with other institutions to support transfer pathways (Espinosa et al., 2015). In fact, in Knight-Manuel et al. (2016) a study conducted to develop a culturally relevant college-going culture for Black and Latino male students in New York public schools, the researchers found that a commitment from school administrators to increase student exposure to university campuses was paramount. While guidance counselors took the lead in developing action plans for advisory courses, administrators focused on college campus visits and the evaluation of transcripts. The responsibility for “increasing Black and Latino males’ exposure to college and careers” (Knight-Manuel et al., 2016, p.18) became the responsibility of educators across all roles within the organization, including teachers, rather than it solely residing with the school guidance counselors. This direct and intentional engagement was prioritized during yield and summer once students were admitted and determining where to enroll. Such targeted efforts include campus visits.

Despite the large body of work, few studies have focused on African American college choice at the campus level among selective public universities in California. Through the lens of college choice theory, I investigated this further.

Chapter 3 - Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

In this chapter I discuss the theoretical and conceptual framework in which this study is situated. I considered several related theories that address the unique college choice processes for different groups. The primary theoretical framework in which my study was situated is Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) *college choice theory*. I also drew from Perna's *Conceptual Model of College Choice* (Perna & Kurban, 2013), Acevedo-Gil's *College-Conocimiento* (Acevedo-Gil, 2017), and Alvarez's *Latina/o Student and Parent College-Going Negotiation Model* (Alvarez, 2015). While some of these theories focus on Latinx students, they provide a framework that looks beyond the traditional choice model and highlight other key factors that are demographic-specific and play a key role in how students from particular racial/ethnic subgroups may experience the college process. These theories also expand the framework through which African American student college choice can be understood. The findings from this study can also help in further developing a college choice model specific to the experiences of African American students and their families.

Hossler and Gallagher's College Choice Theory

Hossler and Gallagher (1987) described a three-phase college choice model: *predisposition*, *search*, and *choice*. During the first phase of *predisposition*, students assess whether attending college is even something that they see themselves doing. The authors outlined how important the role of the student's background characteristics are in determining whether and where they go to college. Socioeconomic status (SES) was one of a few background characteristics that influence whether a student decides to attend college as early as their primary school years. Ability and achievement are other influencers. As students experience educational success, their likelihood of pursuing higher education increases. Beyond personal characteristics, familial and community members can help shape whether students consider attending college and where they ultimately enroll, along with extended family, friends, and community. Parental perceptions and expectations play a key role in how students

view higher education and decide where they will go to college – if at all. Another key factor is proximity to college; students who live closer to a college/university are more likely to go to college than students in more rural settings. High school setting is another crucial factor, which includes whether a college-going culture is promoted within and outside of the classroom. Similarly, although not as strongly correlated, organizational factors serve a role in the predisposition stage. One example is precollege experiences that students have during their K-12 schooling, such as being involved in clubs, organizations, and co-curricular activities.

In the *search phase*, students establish what the authors call a choice set, which is the set of colleges the student has identified to apply to and obtain additional information from (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). Students' choice sets might be more robust or more limited based on their exposure to college through school campus visits and other direct opportunities. In this stage, institutions can make a greater impact, and should focus more attention on increasing the application pool as students develop a choice set or a group of institutions that they will conduct more research on. Black students and low-income families are more likely to rely on counselors for feedback as well as more likely to have “less effective” and longer searches. A primary challenge in this phase is the lack of information that some students may receive about an institution resulting in undermatching. In this instance, students may unintentionally remove an institution from their choice set due to having a lack of awareness and accurate information about an institution. Communication and clarity about the net price cost and overall institution brand are other critical challenges in this stage. Understanding the difference between the estimated cost of attendance compared with the net price – which may be significantly lower – is an important factor that institutions must address to attract students who would otherwise apply to a particular campus but are not clear on the cost and do not see the institution as a viable option.

The final phase is *choice*. This is the point at which the student decides where they will attend, and weighing out that decision is greatly influenced by both communication strategies of the institution as well as the real or perceived impact of cost and any associated aid in paying for college (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). Students now evaluate their choice set. The authors indicated that colleges and universities can only have a minor impact. Students are courted in this stage, and communications strategies such as letters from the campus president along with special events such as banquets on campus become more important. An emphasis on personalization becomes critical and resonates strongly with students. Since most students have already determined what universities they are seriously considering, institutions may already be eliminated from that list before they have an opportunity to truly court the student. In terms of financial aid and scholarships (FAS), the quantity and type of aid are key factors in influencing choice, the impact of which “may vary among the types of institutions and students” (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987, p. 217). Addressing cost and facilitating financial literacy become greater priorities for institutions seeking to enroll students with a certain demographic profile, such as those who will be the first in their family to obtain a 4-year degree or low-income students.

Perna’s Conceptual Model of College Choice

Perna (2006) posited that students make college choices based on a cost–benefit analysis, which is influenced by four contextual layers: (a) Habitus, (b) School and Community context, (c) Higher Education context, and (d) Social, Economic, and Policy context (Perna, 2006, pg. 117). The first and innermost layer, individual habitus (otherwise known as the student/family context), reflects the internal thoughts and perceptions about potential postsecondary options. As Hossler and Gallagher (1987) reported in the school and community context, the resources and social structures in a secondary school either help to facilitate or limit a student’s progress in enrolling in college. Additionally, the school context may be even more restrictive in supporting low-income and minoritized students. The

third layer is the higher education context, and the final layer is the policy/economic/social context. Colleges and universities influence the student choice process based on how well they can convey information actively (or conversely) to students as well as their families and communities. Higher education institutions also play a critical role in this context “through their ability to select which applicants may enroll, as well as through available enrollment slots” (Perna & Kurban, 2013, p. 14) and their institutional attributes that resonate with a student’s social and personal identity. Institutions also serve as a source of information in a passive manner through their geographic location, including proximity to a student’s home, and more actively through recruitment and marketing efforts and initiatives.

In alignment with Hossler and Gallagher (1987) and expanding upon their research, Perna and Kurban (2013) discussed the influence of income on college choice and the types of colleges and universities students apply to. They discussed the overrepresentation of low-income students at for-profit universities and community colleges and highlighted the following four predictors of college choice in terms of where a student decides to enroll: financial resources, academic preparation and achievement, support from significant others, and finally knowledge and information about college and financial aid (Perna & Kurban, 2013). For some students, all four of these factors can be at play and influence their choice process. Of note are challenges that high school college counselors have in conveying information about the institution to their students regarding college and financial aid, and they are a more pervasive phenomenon in lower-performing schools in which counselors have other responsibilities not related to college, meaning they have limited availability.

To better understand models that speak to specific cultural dimensions that may differ for different subgroups, Acevedo-Gil (2017) and Alvarez (2015) have introduced two additional choice models. Acevedo-Gil’s *college-conocimiento* focused on the college choice of Latinx students and built on existing college choice models but expanded the narrative to include additional phases following the

predisposition and search phases and before choice, which may influence Latinx students in particular. This includes how students see themselves at the college/university before they even enroll, assessing what their obstacles might be as well as their needs. Acevedo-Gil (2017) described many different agents and sources of college information, ranging from siblings and family to the high school and college institution itself. Alvarez's *Latina/o Student and Parent College-Going Negotiation Model* aims to better capture the choice process for Latina/o students and their families and "includes both students and parents as the unit of analysis... includes emotional aspects of the decision-making process; and, third, it introduces the idea of time into the college-going process" (Alvarez, 2015, p. 56). The model expands the college choice model with additional elements that focus more specifically on the negotiations that Latina/o students and their families make during the process of choosing and enrolling at a college. Alvarez operationalized this model through the following three primary components, which are used to determine student and family actions related to their college planning and attendance process: College-Going Timeline, Environmental Factors, and Negotiation Variables, as outlined in Figure 5. A key aspect of this model is Environmental Factors, which influence the process of negotiation and "create the conditions and boundaries in which students and parents engage in decision making along the College-Going Timeline" (e.g., federal and state policy, school resources, tracking, geographic location, interactions with peers, and socioeconomic status) (Alvarez, 2015, p. 58). The Negotiation Variables are critical factors that Alvarez argued influence students and parents along all three stages of the dominant model of student college choice (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987), and they consist of the following components: (a) Mental and Physical Health, (b) Separation From/of Family, (c) Self-Sufficiency, (d) Academic Capabilities, (e) Knowledge of Postsecondary Education, (f) Financial Aid, (g) Value of Education, and (h) Pressure to Fulfill Parents' Expectations (Alvarez, 2015).

Figure 5

Alvarez's Latina/o Student Parent College-Going Negotiation Model

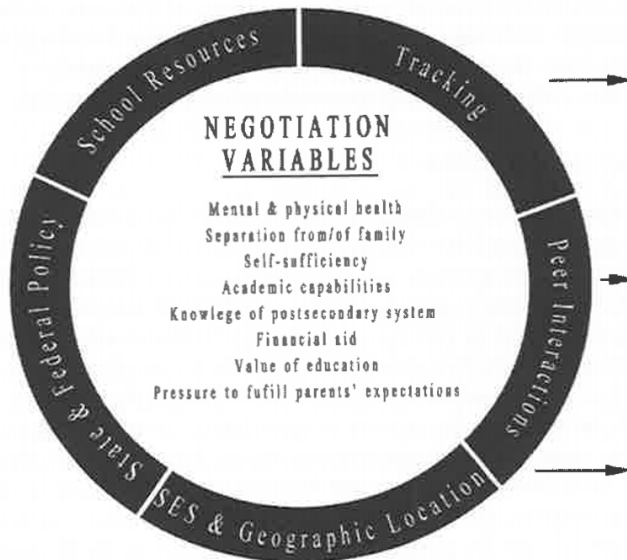


Figure 5.1 Latina/o Student Parent College-Going Negotiation Model

(Alvarez, 2015)

Currently, little research has resulted in an established model focused on the college choice of African American students, and much less exists on gender differences among African American students. Most studies are situated within existing models, leading back to the framework in which the present study was situated. To frame the choice process of African American first-year students, my study also utilized the existing models highlighted above with the intention of highlighting key influencers and considerations that ultimately drive the choice stage. In addition to gender, I explored the ways in which other key drivers (e.g., cost/FAS, sense of belonging, parent/family influence, academic and reputation, and potential for economic and social mobility) impact the choice of Black first-year admits to UC Davis.

Chapter 4 - Research Design

Adopting a mixed-methods approach, this study addressed the following research questions:

1. In what ways do the characteristics of African American first-year students admitted to UC Davis differ between those who submit an SIR and those who do not?
2. What are the experiences that influence whether African American first-year students admitted to UC Davis submit an SIR?

To address research question 1, I conducted a quantitative analysis using existing administrative data on admission and enrollment by student characteristics (e.g., race/ethnicity, first-gen college student, geographic location, school type, and socioeconomic status) as well as NSC data among African American freshman admitted to UC Davis in fall 2018. This analysis was conducted to determine the different characteristics between African American first-year admits who did and did not submit an SIR. I next analyzed survey data collected among fall 2018 African American applicants who declined their offer of admission to gain greater insights into their choice process. To address research question 2, I conducted semi-structured interviews with seven African American first-year students admitted to UC Davis for fall 2020 who had declined their offer of admission. These interviews were conducted to document student narratives and to better understand “the why” of their decision not to attend, thus ensuring a robust and comprehensive study.

Setting/Context

UC Davis is a public-land grant University located in the city of Davis, CA, which has a total population of nearly 69,000 residents.² The campus has four academic colleges: the College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences, College of Biological Sciences, College of Engineering, and College of Letters and Science, along with six professional schools. UC Davis had an overall student enrollment of 39,152 for fall 2018, including approximately 30,718 undergraduate students (Business

² US Census <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/profile?g=1600000US0618100>

Institutional Analysis, 2019). In 2017, UC Davis reached a 4% undergraduate enrollment of African American students. It is also the closest UC campus to Sacramento, one of the five counties with the largest Black populations in the state as previously highlighted. According to the 2018–20 Common Data Set, UCD has 671 degree-seeking African American undergraduate students, including first-time first-year students (UC Davis, 2020). Assuming that retention remains consistent, to get from 4% to 6% African American undergraduates, the campus would need to enroll approximately 600 new students. See Appendices 3–5 for a snapshot of the UC Davis campus profile along with the fall enrollment headcount.

Admissions Process

UC uses one application for all applicants seeking to enroll at the undergraduate level in the fall term. The application opens on August 1 and all applications must be completed and submitted in November of the year prior to the fall term of enrollment. First-year applicants are then reviewed and notified no later than March. Students are considered for admissions based on completion of the freshman admissions requirements, which include the following: (a) completing a set of high school college preparatory coursework (referred to as a-g) and (b) meeting the minimum required grade point average; furthermore, until the fall 2021 admission cycle another requirement was (c) completing the SAT with Essay or ACT with Writing (UC Davis Undergraduate Admissions, 2019). For fall 2021 through fall 2024, UC Davis is test-free for all freshman applicants, meaning that the campus “will not consider SAT or ACT test scores when making admissions decisions or awarding scholarships,” in alignment with the UC Regents May 2020 decision to suspend the standardized test requirement (UC Davis Undergraduate Admissions, 2021). California residents have two pathways through which they can be admitted to a UC campus if not admitted at any of the campuses to which they have applied: Eligibility in the Statewide Context and Eligibility in the Local Context (ELC). The first consists of students who are determined as being in the top 9% of California high school graduates based on UC’s admissions index.

The second pathway, ELC, consists of students who rank in the top 9% of the graduating class at their high school (UC Admissions, 2019). As most campuses have more qualified applicants who meet the freshman admissions requirements than they have space to accommodate, UC employs a process called comprehensive review, in which freshman applications are reviewed with consideration of 14 faculty-approved criteria, which include academic and nonacademic factors as outlined below:

1. Academic grade point average in all completed “a-g” courses, including additional points for completed UC-certified honors courses.
3. Scores on the ACT with Writing, the SAT (taken prior to March 2016), or SAT with Essay (taken March 2016 or later).³
4. Performance in and number of a-g courses: Number of, content of, and performance in academic courses beyond the minimum “a-g” requirements.
4. Number of and performance in UC-approved honors and Advanced Placement courses.
5. Eligibility in the Local Context (CA residents only): Identified by UC as being ranked in the top 9% of their high school class (i.e., ELC).
6. Quality of a student's senior-year program, as measured by the type and number of academic courses in progress or planned.
7. Quality of a student's academic performance relative to the educational opportunities available in their high school.
8. Outstanding performance in one or more academic subject areas.
9. Outstanding work in one or more special projects in any academic field of study.
10. Recent marked improvement in academic performance, as demonstrated by academic grade point averages (GPA) and the quality of coursework completed or in progress.

³ Not considered for the fall 2021–fall 2024 admissions cycle for all freshman applicants. Source: <https://www.ucdavis.edu/admissions/undergraduate/freshman/requirements>

11. Special talents, achievements, and awards in a particular field, such as visual and performing arts, communication, or athletic endeavors; special skills, such as demonstrated written and oral proficiency in other languages; special interests, such as intensive study and exploration of other cultures; experiences that demonstrate unusual promise for leadership, such as significant community service or significant participation in student government; or other significant experiences or achievements that demonstrate the student's promise for contributing to the intellectual vitality of a campus.
12. Completion of special projects undertaken in the context of a student's high school curriculum or in conjunction with special school events, projects, or programs.
13. Academic accomplishments in light of a student's life experiences and special circumstances.
14. Location of a student's secondary school and residence.

(University of California, 2019)

First-year applicants to UC Davis for the fall term are notified of their admissions in early-to-mid-March whether admitted, not admitted, or invited to accept a space on the waitlist. Students who are admitted and would like to accept their offer of admission must submit their SIR to one UC campus by May 1, which is also known as the National Candidates Reply Date.

Research Design - Research Question 1

I aimed to answer the first question exploring differences in characteristic between Black freshman admits who accept their offer of admission and those who do not using a quantitative approach. In the following section I detail my methods of data collection and analysis plan.

Data and Measures

I first conducted a descriptive analysis of African American first-year admits, investigating similarities and differences between those students who submit an SIR and those who do not submit an

SIR. Using descriptive statistics, I explored the overall trends of fall 2018 African American first-year admits. To do so, I relied upon existing administrative data from several sources:

1. Application and enrollment data, obtained from UCD Undergraduate Admissions (UA) and Enrollment Management Analytics, to provide basic demographic information.
2. NSC data from UCD Business Institutional Analysis to determine which U.S. college/university SIR-No students enrolled in the fall.
3. SIR-No Survey data from UCD UA to investigate stated reasons for not choosing UC Davis.

Once the overall trends were determined, I then drilled down to students who did not submit an SIR to determine, first, how these students compare on a variety of characteristics with those who did submit an SIR. Second, I used NSC data to determine whether a correlation existed between the background characteristics and academic credentials and where students attended, if not UC Davis. Third, I examined students' survey responses regarding why they did not choose to attend to UC Davis. More specifically, I used information from the application and existing admissions and enrollment data to compare students who said yes with students who said no. In addition, data from the annual SIR-No survey distributed to first-year admitted students who contacted UA through the student portal to decline their offer of admission provided information about why some students said no. Specifically, students were invited by UA to complete a brief survey to allow the University to better understand how students are making their decisions. The survey outcomes highlighted several factors that influence student college choice and helped inform the interview questions selected for addressing research question 2.

In this study, African American first-year admits were defined as African American high school seniors in spring 2018 who applied to UC Davis and received an offer of admission from the campus for the fall 2018 term. Fall 2018 was selected because the office of admissions did not make waitlist offers in this particular year. I excluded summer melt students, that is, first-year admits who submitted an SIR

indicating that they would enroll in the fall but did not. This number generally varies from those who ultimately enroll (for UCD, this number for freshmen is typically less than a couple hundred students per year). To set the stage of the demographic make-up of the undergraduate student body, I examined the descriptive statistics generated from pre-existing admissions and enrollment data on all African American first-year students admitted to UC Davis for fall 2018. In Table 1, among all African American freshman admits, I compared the differences between SIR-Yes and SIR-No based on the outlined variables. Note that demographic information was based on self-reported data. In Table 2, among all African American freshman admits, I compared the competitor institutions that SIR-No students ultimately enrolled in. Specific variables are also outlined in Table 1.

Pre-Existing Survey Data

Next, I conducted an analysis of existing survey data distributed to admitted first-year students who declined their offer of admission to UC Davis. The purpose of the survey was to gain a greater understanding of why students chose not to attend UC Davis. The UA office at UC Davis requires that admitted students who wish to accept their offer of admission submit an SIR online via the student portal. There is also an option for students who choose not to attend UCD to log in and decline their offer of admissions. While not required, students who choose to decline their offer are prompted to complete a brief survey, also referred to as the SIR-No survey. This survey was previously developed by UA in collaboration with the analytics team and marketing and communications. Questions in the survey address the following themes: the institution the student will attend instead of UCD, reason(s) for choosing not to attend, UCD rank among the student's choices, campus visit, and visit type before making their decision (see Appendix F for survey questions). I reviewed and analyzed the survey responses of fall 2018 admitted first-year African American students who did not submit an SIR and notified the Office of Admissions that they were not going to attend in the fall. Survey responses were coded for key categories and themes, as detailed further in the Data Analysis section.

Table 1

Fall 2018 African First-Year Admits – Student Demographic Characteristics (N = 1,041)

Characteristic	Description
Gender ^a	Female/Male
Parental Education	
First Generation (First Gen)	Parents do not have a 4-year college degree
Not First Generation	Parents do have a 4-year college degree
Income	
Low-Income	Eligible for reduced-priced lunch
Not low-income	Not eligible for reduced-priced lunch
California School Type	
CA Public or Private	CA high schools (divided into Public or Private) based on data captured from UC application
All Outside CA ^b	High schools outside of California
LCFF Plus (LCFF+) Status	LCFF plus school (yes/no); determined annually by the State of CA
Academic Profile	
High School GPA (mean GPA)	Weighted, capped UC GPA
SAT/ACT Score (official)	SAT Reasoning overall score/ACT composite score
Eligible in the Local Context (ELC)	California high school seniors determined to be in the top 9% of their graduating class
UCOP Regions	
CA Regions Top 5 ^c	Los Angeles county, Riverside/San Bernadino, Sacramento, San Diego/Imperial, San Francisco Bay Area
Out of State	High school is located outside of CA

Note:^a Gender is reported as male and female. Due to cell size, non-specified gender is excluded. ^b

Includes international students. ^c Reflects the top five regions in California, and all admits outside of CA based on regions where the total number of admits is 50 or higher. I do not show regions with fewer than 50 admits for other reasons given the insufficient sample size.

Table 2*Fall 2018 African First-Year Admits – SIR No College Destination (N = 1,041)*

SIR-No College Destination	Measures
University of California (UC)	Los Angeles, Berkeley, Santa Barbara, Irvine, San Diego, Riverside, Santa Cruz, Merced
Campus ^a	
California State University (CSU)	All CSU campuses
4-Year California (CA) ^b	All other 4-year colleges/universities in CA
2-Year California	2-year college in CA
Historically Black College/University (HBCU)	All HBCUs
Out-of-State ^c	All other 4-year colleges/universities outside of CA
No College	Not enrolled in a 2- or 4-year college

Note: ^a Excludes students who enrolled at UC Davis based on National Student Clearinghouse data. The N for UCR, UCSC, and UCM was fewer than 10 for each campus. As such, the combined total is reported. ^b Excludes UC and CSU. ^c Excludes HBCUs. Due to the small cell size, 2-year out-of-state is included in the out-of-state total.

Survey Sample

As outlined in Table 3, in fall 2018, approximately 1,021 African American freshman applicants were admitted to UCD, of whom 232 enrolled and 789 students did not. Among the students who did not enroll, 165 formally declined their offer of admission and completed the SIR-No survey to provide insights regarding the factors that influenced their decision (representing a response rate of approximately 21%). This is a reasonable response rate, albeit likely non-representative, which is determined based on total enrolled rather than total SIRs. Furthermore, the survey data include California and domestic nonresidents. Additionally, the number of students who did not enroll is based on final fall enrollment numbers, which includes a small number of students who intended to enroll (i.e., who submitted a SIR-Yes in the spring but did not end up enrolling in the fall).

Table 3*UC Davis African American Freshman Profile*

Year	Applicants*	Admits*	Enrolled*	Did Not Enroll^	SIR-No Survey Respondents**	Response Rate^^
Fall 2018	3,685	1,021	232	789	165	21%
Fall 2017	3,332	934	193	741	151	20%
Fall 2016	3,253	887	180	707	142	20%
Fall 2015	2,910	175	175	507	98	19%

Note: Due to differences in when the data were pulled, the overall fall 2018 African freshman admit number listed in Table 3 differs slightly from the data in Table 4.

*Source: UC Davis Enrollment Management Analytics, Freshman Profile Official Snapshot, 10/18/2018

**Source: UC Davis Undergraduate Admissions IA, 6/29/2019

^Did Not Enroll = Total Admits – Total Enrolled

^^Response Rate = Total SIR-No Survey respondents/Total Did Not Enroll

For fall 2015–2017 the response rate ranged from 19% to 20%. For technical reasons, the fall 2019 SIR-No survey was not distributed to all SIR-No admits who notified UA that they would not be accepting their offer of admission. As such, the survey response numbers for that cohort of admits did not reflect a large enough sample size and were not used for this study.

A few limitations regarding the data in this survey are worth noting. As described in the previous section, the survey focused on students who notified the university that they were not submitting a SIR. The SIR is administered electronically only to admitted students who take the time to notify the Office of Admissions via the admitted student portal that they will not be accepting their admissions offer. Upon receiving this notification, students receive an invitation to complete a brief online survey that is integrated within the student portal. The survey is not presently distributed to admitted students who do not notify the Office of Admissions that they will not submit an SIR. Survey responses are dynamic

and received on an ongoing basis from the time students are admitted through the SIR deadline (see Appendix F for survey questions). Students who complete the survey may also not be representative of all African American students admitted who choose not to enroll, since they opted to (a) let UCD know of their decision to decline the admissions offer, and b) took the time to complete the survey and let us know why. Nevertheless, they represented a valuable source of information about students' college choice considerations.

Data Analysis Plan

To answer the question of whether the characteristics of African American first-year students admitted to UC Davis differ between those who submit an SIR and those who do not, I conducted a descriptive analysis to compare the background characteristics of SIR-Yes and SIR-No admitted African American admits to determine any differences. Using the method of triangulation, which involved “examining evidence from the sources and using it to build a coherent justification for themes” (Creswell, 2014, p. 201) I analyzed pre-existing data, both survey data and other administrative data on admission and enrollment by student characteristics along with NSC data noting where fall 2018 admitted African American freshman enrolled if not UC Davis. I used tabulations and *t* tests to compare the characteristics of SIR-Yes and SIR-No African American students based on the measures outlined in Table 1, which included high school GPA and SAT score. I also compared institution types based on the measures listed in Table 2 to better understand the institution type at which SIR-No admits enroll.

The purpose of this analysis was to gain insights about the African American first-year students who choose not to enroll at UC Davis to improve recruitment and yield efforts to increase enrollment of as many African American students as possible to support the campus diversity goals and priorities. Gender differences helped to inform the unique needs of African American males in deciding whether to enroll at UC Davis. Academic college/major were analyzed to determine if a connection exists between selected major/college and SIRs. This was intended to help inform future recruitment and yield

strategies in different academic areas, to determine whether there are areas that UC Davis tends to lose more admits, and to determine where losses can be mitigated through adjustments in marketing, communications, and other strategic collaborations with those specific colleges/majors.

Geographic location was analyzed to determine if proximity to campus is correlated with SIRs for African American students. The data helped inform what regions in the state can be strategically targeted to support a greater yield. This included comparing SIR and non-SIR African American students across different counties/regions in California and uncovering where recruitment and yield efforts may be better targeted. This also afforded the opportunity to align partner engagement, such as collaboration with the African American Alumni Association, more regionally with students and families. The same is the case for first-gen and low-income status, as this study provides context regarding how well UC Davis yields Black students who are the first in their family to obtain a 4-year degree compared with those who do not. I also conducted a cross-comparison between parent education level, income, and SIR response with the goal of informing where FAS are making the greatest impact to meet campus enrollment goals.

Finally, a better understanding of where admitted students are attending – if not UC Davis – through this study's quantitative analysis will inform future strategies and help the University to identify opportunities to continue or adjust efforts, and also determine where additional resources should be added to include Black student enrollment moving forward. Understanding what institutions we are losing students to also helped in the development of the interview questions for the second portion of this study; specifically, these questions involved what aspects of a college/university Black freshman admitted students most value, and where UC Davis can improve upon in telling its story to better resonate with students, families, and community members. Having a greater understanding of the key competitors also presented an opportunity to learn more about what similar institutions are doing to yield students who may otherwise accept their offer of admission at UC Davis.

Research Design – Research Question 2

In the second part of this study, I looked beyond the numbers to better understand *why* African American students admitted to UC Davis do not enroll. Based on the survey findings and drawing from related studies such as those of Teranishi and Briscoe (2008) and Contreras et al. (2015), I followed up on student impressions about the campus, cost, and key influencers on their decision. I also expanded upon findings that emerged from the SIR-No survey results to obtain a better sense of what African American student perceptions in the local region are of the campus and how the respondents weighed their choices. My inquiry was also situated around students' perception beginning with their own opportunities, preferences, and aspirations. I inquired about their perceptions of the campus climate at UC Davis as well as cost, financial aid, and scholarships. Additionally, I sought to learn what students prioritized in a college experience and how that influenced where they decided to enroll.

Data Collection

My qualitative inquiry consisted of one-on-one, semi-structured interviews. Interviews took place via Zoom, allowing for the interviews to be recorded and any barriers to conducting an interview with students outside the local area to be alleviated. To support more direct engagement, the interviews were conducted utilizing Zoom's video chat feature. Interviews were conducted on an individual basis via video conferencing using the Zoom platform. This technology allowed for each interview to be recorded for later transcription. Interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes. In addition to Zoom, I utilized additional audio voice recorders as a back-up to ensure that data were accurately captured, and I also took limited hand-written field notes. Data were stored in a password protected Google Drive folder. Pseudonyms were employed for each interviewee to protect the identities of each participant. Once the interviews were completed, I submitted the recordings to a transcription service. Once transcribed, I reviewed and listened to the entire recording of each interview to align it with the

transcription. I completed my initial transcription review within approximately 3 days of each interview. Following this, I implemented coding as outlined in the data analysis portion of this study.

Sample

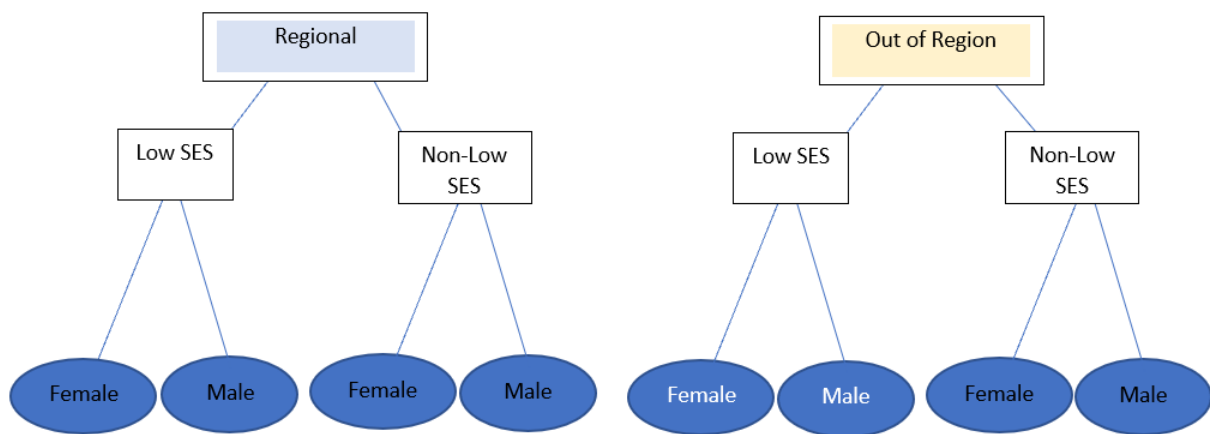
As previously mentioned, for my quantitative analysis fall 2018 was selected given the campus did not admit any freshmen from their waitlist that admissions cycle so I did not have to consider how being admitted from the waitlist influenced a student's college choice. Additionally, due to technical reasons the fall 2019 SIR-No survey was not distributed to all SIR-No admits and therefore did not reflect a large enough sample size. Thus, fall 2018 was the most current and comprehensive dataset available to address research question 1. In terms of my qualitative analysis, I selected the fall 2020 admissions cycle to ensure data collected was current given this was the most recent admissions cohort.

I interviewed a total of seven African American freshman admits who did not submit an SIR for fall 2020, to ensure enough diversity in respondents across the dimensions noted below. My target was to obtain students from two areas: Regional (Greater Sacramento and Bay area) and Out of Region (all other areas in California). Doing so allowed me to "control" for the ubiquitous issues of college distance in the choice process. Within the Out of Region, I prioritized students from Los Angeles County and Inland Empire as these regions have a high concentration of African American residents. These are also areas that UC Davis has targeted for strategic recruitment efforts. The sample selection included all SIR-No admits. I stratified the population of African American SIR-No students by the following areas: first by regions, then by socioeconomic status (low-income status), followed by gender (students who identify as male and female). Each area represents important characteristics of the interviewees that were crucial for gaining greater insight by which to disaggregate prospective African American students at UC. I then randomly chose two to three students from each of these groups to request an interview from. Anticipating a low response rate, I continued to draw from these respective populations until I had a

willing participant. Within each gender group I targeted two or three students. With the goal of interviewing eight students, I interviewed seven. Figure 6 presents my sample strategy:

Figure 6

Interview Sampling Strategy



Pilot Interview Protocol

I piloted my interview protocol with three admitted students from fall 2018 and fall 2019 who chose not to attend UC Davis. I worked with our campus outreach/academic preparation programs and local school partners to identify these students. Once identified, I scheduled a Zoom meeting with each interviewee and provided them with additional background information in advance. At the end of each pilot interview, I built in some time to get comments and observations from each participant regarding what worked and what adjustments they felt would strengthen the interview process from their vantage point. I also requested their feedback regarding the actual interview questions, including whether there were questions they felt were not necessary along with any questions I should have asked but did not. Additionally, I requested that each participant complete a brief demographic survey to assist in coding the data gathered from our interview. Questions ranged from parent education level to gender identity/expression, household size, and income. This survey, which was distributed following each interview, included a comment area at the end for participants to provide any additional feedback and/or recommendations that would strengthen the interview process and survey questionnaire.

Overall, the feedback was positive and everyone responded quickly to the survey. One key change made based on feedback from an interviewee was to add a question specifically asking the student why they chose not to attend UC Davis. My initial questions were designed to gain insight for addressing this question, but initially I did not ask this question directly. From the pilot I also incorporated a question regarding the role of marketing efforts in the student's decision not to enroll. In terms of timing, the pilot interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes which seemed appropriate. However, this included the additional time I carved out at the end to get their insight. As a result, I revised the timeframe of my final protocol to consist of 30-minute interviews (not to exceed 45 minutes). Based on my pilot interviews, I learned that students were all very excited about UC Davis, and their decision had less to do with not feeling welcome or concerns with the academic reputation of the

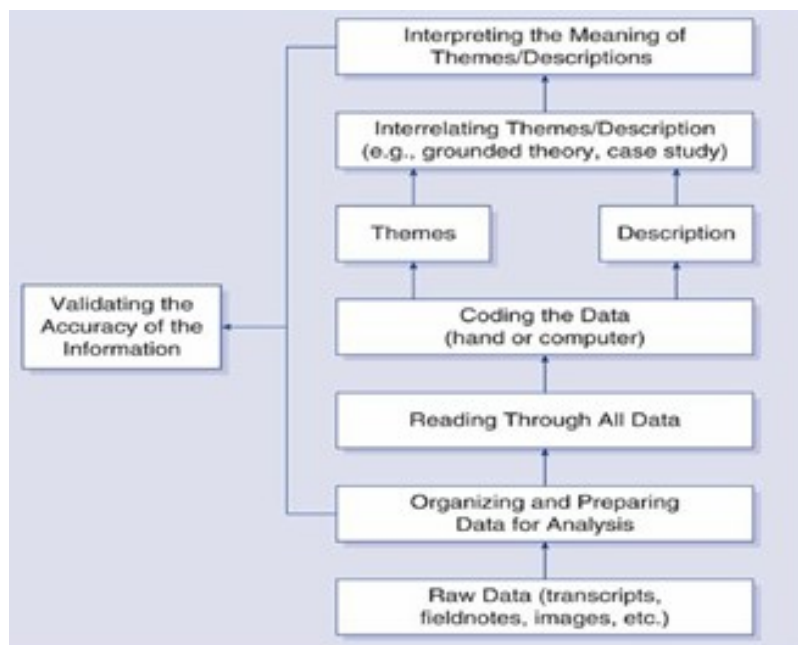
University and more to do with what information they had about the campus. Specifically, of importance was knowing who to connect with, and having and a greater awareness of how to access additional information that may be relevant for their decision-making process as well as concerns surrounding costs. As such, I refined my final interview questions around these areas utilizing the National Center for Postsecondary Improvement's Sample Interview Protocol Form as a template (see Appendix G for the finalized interview questions).

Data Analysis

In analyzing the interview data, I utilized Creswell's seven-step approach, which is outlined in Figure 7. I began my analysis by gathering and organizing the raw data and built up to coding and identifying themes, followed by interpreting the findings (Creswell, 2014). I approached the data analysis with a combination of open coding and preset codes/themes based on college choice theory and themes that emerged from the Project Excel study.

Figure 7

Creswell's Seven-Step Approach to Qualitative Analysis



Preset themes included Family Influence, Cost/Affordability, and Sense of Belonging. I began the data analysis by open coding a subset of randomly selected interviews. Using Axial coding, I then took the open codes and grouped them into code families based on the themes that emerged. I included a code family of “other” for any codes that did not fit into the other identified themes. The intention behind doing this was to develop a code book that could then be referenced to return to and analyze interview data for all interviews conducted. I wrote rich descriptions of what each code meant. During the process of coding, I adopted the strategy of memo writing, in which I wrote myself a memo outlining what I had coded, links between themes, any feelings or observations about what I had coded, and observations about the participant. Next, I wrote metamemos, which are themes that occur frequently and lead to big themes. I identified themes that aligned with college choice theory related to influencers of students in the choice stage, including family context, school context, and community context. However, I allowed for any additional themes that emerged through open coding.

Positionality

My prior experience with this topic spans from personal to professional. Personally, the key experiences that connect me to this topic include being African American, growing up in California, being an alumnus of the UC system (obtaining my undergraduate degree from a UC campus), and graduating from high school when Prop 209 was being debated, which was ultimately passed by state voters during the first quarter of my freshman year of college at a UC campus. I also have experience of participating in a tracking system as part of my secondary education. I was tracked into college-prep courses based on early test scores from a gifted and talented program. During my high school career, I also participated in an educational preparation program that provided me with exposure to various college campuses. While technically not first-gen, my experience of being raised by a single parent who went back to school while working full-time has given me a unique glimpse into the experience of not

having a parent or family member go through the same college choice process as I did, particularly entering as a freshman. However, I was also able to see the value of education modeled.

Another area around this topic that I explored was the role of faith-based organizations in influencing African Americans' college choice. In this regard, my first experience was with my pastor when growing up, who consistently encouraged reaching for the stars, which included going to college. I have also worked with youth for many years as a youth ministry leader and choir director, as well as served young adults through a state convention. Demographically, most were African American and there was a broad range of families who did not have a college background, and variance in socioeconomic status influenced whether college was a priority versus graduating from high school and getting a job. This speaks to the many messages that young people receive and consider as they determine their educational and career pathways.

Professionally, my 20 years of experience as an admissions professional are highly relevant to this topic as I have had the opportunity to view and be part of the college choice process through many facets. Before obtaining my first professional job, as an undergraduate student I volunteered to return to my old high school and talk to students about college and my specific campus. I also volunteered to assist with student-initiated outreach programs to bring African American and other students of color to campus, to provide exposure and encourage their college attendance. Subsequently, I worked as a recruiter for 7 years serving students in the Bay area and northern California. This included working with high school and community college students, counselors, families, and other stakeholders. As my role expanded to overseeing the recruitment team, I gained more insight into the college choice process, with my portfolio expanding to campus tours and events, national and international recruitment, and coordination with campus partners (i.e., alumni association, FAS office, retention services, and student support centers) as well as faculty and administrators at the highest levels of the campus. In my previous role as Executive Director of Undergraduate Admissions at UC Davis for 5 years, I oversaw the entire UA

operations, which expanded my responsibilities, interactions, and oversight to focus on policy, public finance and budget, enrollment planning, and shared governance. This included working with stakeholders across the campus (e.g., College Deans, faculty committees, Alumni leadership, Vice Chancellors and Associate Vice Chancellors, Government Relations, and Media Relations) and focusing on marketing and communication, school partnerships with high school and community college districts as part of campus initiatives and beyond.

Thus, I am uniquely situated for this research through my personal and professional experiences. I have had a lifetime of preliminary research through lived experiences, both professionally and personally, which have positioned me to explore this topic further through an empirical project. A specific advantage is being located on a campus, having worked in an enrollment management team, and understanding what the enrollment process entails, as well as key considerations that must be weighed and who influences those decisions. I am also uniquely positioned to coordinate with partners in the retention area along with the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. There is currently a large focus at UC Davis on closing the preparation gap, and the campus recently launched a strategic plan⁴ that includes a priority on having a diverse student body that reflects the state of California in alignment with the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion's strategic vision (Equity and Inclusion, n.d.). This is the right time to move forward with this topic and help to identify solutions and address threats to achieving the desired enrollment goals.

Researcher bias is an aspect that I aimed to account for. Having been an admissions professional for 20 years, I brought my own understanding of the UC Davis campus, UC system, and what influences college choice. As such, it was important for me to be objective and mindful not to assert my own opinions or perceptions onto the students during the interview process. This entailed meeting regularly with my dissertation committee Chair to discuss findings and consider alternative explanations. I also did

⁴ UC Davis Strategic Plan – To Boldly Go <https://leadership.ucdavis.edu/strategic-plan>

member checking when concerned that students' identity would be revealed. Another key aspect that I remained mindful of was not overlooking the obvious or assuming that the things I believed to be important to African American students were the same things that they believed to be important. I have insights coming from the community, but the diaspora is diverse and the current generation of students graduating from high school have a different set of social norms and are situated in a political climate that may be quite different from my own journey. As such, I asked questions that allowed for the answers to be uncovered, rather than presenting leading questions. It was critical that I conducted my study without making assumptions and remained open to what I may not have known. Through this study, I aimed to contribute to an area of research that deserves more scholarly attention, and ultimately help to support the overarching goal of supporting access to students who remain highly underrepresented in the UC system.

Chapter 5 - Findings: Research Question 1

Research question 1 focused on determining the differences between admitted first-year African American students who accepted their offer of admission by submitting an SIR and those who did not submit an SIR for fall 2018. To answer this research question, I first compared student characteristics between those who said yes and those who declined their admissions offer in several dimensions, including individual demographic characteristics (e.g., gender, first-gen status, and income status), high school type, and academic factors (e.g., high school GPA and test scores). Table 4 details these differences, noting where the comparisons were statistically significant.

Admitted Student Comparisons

Relative to all first-year applicants admitted to UC Davis in fall 2018, Black students were admitted at a rate of 27.5% compared with the overall freshman admit rate of 41.1%. Black students accounted for 4.4% of all freshman admits in fall 2018, a slight increase from 2018 and 2017.⁵ Regarding Black first-year applicants who are admitted to UC Davis, a significant percentage chose not to accept their offer. Of the 1,014 African American first-year admits, 76.82% declined their admission offer while 23.18% accepted it. Beginning with gender, disparities exist even among applicants and admission rates. Part of the work in admissions includes assessing applicant, admit, and enrollment trends using multiple variables. Related to the gender gap by race for all applicants, overall, women are known to apply at a higher rate than men. Specifically for fall 2018, among African American freshman applicants, approximately 62% of Black females applied to UC Davis compared with 36% of Black male applicants.⁶ Among those applicants, admission rates for African American women were 70.91%, whereas those for African American men were 28.7%. However, the rate at which Black first-year students accepted their offer of admission did not differ between female students (22.25%) and male students (22.57%).

⁵ Source: UC Davis Enrollment Management Analytics, 10.28.20 Freshman Demographic Profile

⁶ Source: UC Davis Enrollment Management Analytics, UA Profile. Reflects students who identified as cis female and cis male.

Table 4

Fall 2018 African First-Year Admits – SIR Status by Student Demographic Characteristics (N = 1,041)

Characteristic	SIR-Yes		SIR-No		Total		Stat Sig
	%	n	%	n	%	n	
African American Freshmen Admits	23.18	235	76.82	779	100	1,014	
Gender ^a							
Female	22.25	160	77.75	559	70.91	719	
Male	25.77	75	74.23	216	28.7	291	
Parental Education							**
First Generation (First Gen)	28.99	118	71.01	289	41.07	407	
Not First Generation	19.01	111	28.99	473	58.93	584	
Income							
Low-Income	23.78	102	76.22	327	44.87	429	
Not low-income	23.34	123	76.66	404	55.13	527	
California School Type							**
CA Public	29.65	188	70.35	446	62.52	634	
CA Private	21.98	20	78.02	71	8.97	91	
All Outside CA ^b	9.34	27	90.66	262	28.5	289	
LCFF Plus (LCFF+) Status							*
LCFF+	28.44	62	71.56	156	21.85	218	
Not LCFF+	21.73	273	78.27	623	78.5	796	
Academic Profile							
High School GPA (mean GPA)	3.97	235	4.07	778	4.05	1,013	**
SAT/ACT Score (official)	1173	232	1277	738	1252	970	**
Eligible in the Local Context (ELC)							
ELC	26.02	127	73.98	361	48.13	488	*
Non-ELC (includes out-of-state)	20.53	108	79.47	418	51.87	526	
UCOP Regions (CA Regions Top 5) ^c							**
Los Angeles County	25.4	64	74.6	188	25.53	252	
Riverside/San Bernardino	31.11	28	68.89	62	9.12	90	
Sacramento Area	50.88	29	49.12	28	5.78	57	
San Diego/Imperial	27.27	18	72.73	48	6.69	66	
San Francisco Bay Area	29.09	48	70.91	117	16.72	165	
Out of State	8.75	23	91.25	240	26.65	263	

Note: ^a Gender is reported as male and female; due to cell size, non-specified gender is excluded. ^b Includes international students. ^c Reflects the top five regions in California, and all admits outside of CA based on regions where the total number of admits is 50 or higher. I do not show regions with fewer than 50 student admits given the insufficient sample size. Statistical significance reflects comparisons across all regions (N = 1,041).

* $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$.

When comparing other demographic characteristics, the data revealed that first-gen students accepted their admission offer at a higher rate than non-first-gen students. Yet, among Black admitted students, significant differences in yield rates on the basis of income status were not observed. That is, higher-income Black students were no more likely to accept their admissions offer at UC Davis than lower-income Black students. Next, I compared SIRs by school type. Admits from California public high schools tended to yield at a slightly higher rate than admits from CA private high schools. Admits outside of California declined their offer of admission at a significantly higher rate – nearly 20 percentage points greater than admits from California public high schools, and close to 12 percentage points higher than admits from California private high schools. Admits outside of California declined their offer of admission at a much higher rate than students graduating from a high school in state.

In 2013, the state of California enacted a new school funding and accountability system known as the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF).⁷ Within this formula, LCFF plus (LCFF+) high schools are schools “in which more than 75 percent of the school’s total enrollment (unduplicated) is composed of pupils who are identified as either English learners, eligible for a free or reduced-price meal, or foster youth....[and are] are eligible for supplemental funding” (University of California, 2017, p. 1). The University received one-time funding to engage with LCFF+ schools to increase applications and enrollment. For African American first-year admits to UC Davis, students from more disadvantaged schools (i.e., LCFF+ schools) saw a slightly higher yield rate compared with those from non-LCFF+ schools. The difference was statistically significant at the .05 level. Thus, the yield rate was slightly higher among students from California schools that are considered more disadvantaged. Of all 1,014 admits, 21.5% ($n = 218$) were from LCFF+ schools. Of all LCFF+ admits, approximately 72% did not submit an SIR.

⁷ <https://www.cde.ca.gov/fg/aa/lc/lcffoverview.asp>

Regarding differences in academic characteristics, students who declined their offer of admission had a slightly higher GPA than students who accepted their offer. Students who declined their offer also had a significantly higher mean SAT score compared with students who accepted their offer. Overall, this indicates that the academic profile of SIR-Nos is higher. Yielding students with a higher SAT and GPA is a more competitive landscape, which suggests that it is possible that many of the students who decide not to come to UC Davis do so because they have offers from more prestigious institutions.

UC identifies California high school seniors who are in the top 9% of their class as ELC. Students determined to be ELC are guaranteed admission to the UC system as space is available, although not a specific campus of their choice.⁸ Of all African American freshman admits, 48.13% ($n = 488$) were identified as ELC. ELC students accepted their offer of admission at a significantly higher rate than non-ELC admits. Conversely, non-ELC students declined their admission at a much higher rate than ELC students.

Finally, I analyzed the SIR patterns based on state regions. In this comparison, my findings included the regions in California with 50 or more admits, which represents approximately 62% of all African American first-year admits. I do not present the other regions given the small sample size, which risks identifying students. Of the top five regions of African American admits in CA, the greatest yield was from the Sacramento Area at 50.88%. I observed that students from southern CA yielded at similar rates, particularly those from San Diego/Imperial County as well as Los Angeles county, although admits from Los Angeles tended to decline their offer at a slightly higher rate. Interestingly, the yield in the San Francisco Bay area was quite similar to those of these two Southern CA counties. This presents an opportunity for the University to take a closer look at where students in this region are choosing to attend and why they are not accepting their offer of admission to UC Davis at higher rates. After

⁸ UC Local guarantee (ELC) <https://admission.universityofcalifornia.edu/admission-requirements/freshman-requirements/california-residents/local-guarantee-elc.html>

Sacramento, the next highest yield rate was in Riverside/San Bernardino. Continued investment and focus in this area has the potential to address differences in why students say yes or no to their admissions offer.

While the focus of this analysis was on students from CA, an interesting observation was that the largest number of African American first-year admits came from out-of-state ($n = 264$) followed by Los Angeles ($n = 252$). These students also declined their admissions offer at the highest rate among all the regions. These data indicate that there is great interest in UC Davis among Black students nationally. However, this same population had the lowest yield at 8.75%, suggesting a significant barrier related to students making the final decision to enroll. This may in part be due to cost but can certainly be attributed to other reasons, which are worth exploring. The data suggest that the University may want to increase its focus on Black students outside of California, who decline their offer of admissions at a rate of 91.25%.

Another important factor to consider when students are determining where they will attend college is their major. For this analysis, I conducted a comparison of SIR status among all Black first-year admits by the four academic Colleges: College of Agriculture & Environmental Sciences (CA&ES), College of Biological Sciences (BioSci), College of Engineering (COE), and Letters & Sciences (L&S), which is the largest College at UC Davis in terms of the number of majors and student enrollment. These comparisons are reflected in Table 5.

When comparing SIR-Yes and SIR-No within each College, CA&ES had the lowest SIR-No rate with 64.38% of all CA&ES declining their offer of admissions compared with 35.63% who accepted their offer of admissions. L&S had the second lowest SIR-No rate at 77.26%. African American first-year admits in BioSci and COE declined their admissions offer at a very similar rate (80–82%). Overall, the patterns by Colleges revealed statistically significant differences in yield rates. The top five majors that African American first-year admits applied to were in the Colleges of Biological Science, CA&ES, and L&S

and included the following majors: Biological Sciences, Psychology, Biochemistry & Molecular Biology, Neurobiology, Physiology & Behavior, and Animal Science. The following majors had the highest number of SIR-Nos among Black students: Biological Sciences, Psychology, Neurobiology, Physiology & Behavior, Biochemistry & Molecular Biology, and Philosophy (see Appendix H).

My analysis further compared the intersectionality of demographics among Black first-year student, as reflected in Table 6. Specifically, I conducted a cross-comparison of differences among students by income level and parent education level, as well as by income level and gender. Students who were first-gen but not low-income submitted an SIR at a much higher rate than all other categories at 41.49%. Students who were neither first-gen nor low-income declined their offer of admission at a much higher rate than all African American admits (81.95%). Students who were first-gen and low-income and those who were not first-gen but were low-income declined their offer of admission at similar rates (close to 76%). This indicates that the influencers around income are similar. Students who are low-income (whether first-gen or not) accepted and declined their offers at a similar rate. The SIR-No for this group was fairly high, indicating that an association likely exists between income and the aid that students receive. This also indicates that where income is not a factor, first-gen students are more likely to SIR-Yes than non-first-gen students. I did not find statistically significant differences by income among female students, nor among male students. That is, male and female students submitted SIRs at the same rates regardless of income level.

College Destinations

Next, I examined the college/university destination of Black admitted first-year students who declined their offer of admission. I explored the following institutional types: a UC campus other than Davis, a CSU campus, a 4-year college/university in California excluding UC and CSU, a 2-year college in California, an HBCU, and a college or university outside of California other than an HBCU. I also report

Table 5*Fall 2018 African First-Year Admits – SIR Status by College (N = 1,041)*

College	SIR-Yes		SIR-No		All African American Freshmen	
	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>
Agriculture & Environmental Science	35.63	57	64.38	103	0.16	160
Biological Science	18.28	51	81.72	228	0.28	279
Engineering	19.67	24	80.33	98	0.12	122
Letters & Science	22.74	103	77.26	350	0.45	453
Total	23.18	235	76.82	779	100.00	1014

Note: Differences between SIR-Yes and SIR-No across colleges were statistically significant $\chi^2 = 18.57$, $p < 0.001$.

Table 6*Fall 2018 African First-Year Admits – SIR Status by Intersectionality of Demographic Characteristics*

Characteristic	SIR-No				Total		Stat Sig
	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	
Parental Education and Income ^a							**
First-Gen and Low-Income	24.38	69	75.62	214	27.91	283	
First-Gen and Not Low-Income	41.59	47	58.41	66	11.14	113	
Not First-Gen and Not Low-Income	18.05	87	81.95	69	47.53	482	
Not First-Gen and Low-Income	23.53	32	76.47	104	13.41	136	
Gender and Income ^b							
Female and Low-Income	22.98	74	77.02	248	33.68	322	
Female and Not Low-Income	22.65	82	77.35	280	37.87	362	
Male and Low-Income	26.42	28	73.58	78	11.09	106	
Male and Not low-Income	25.31	41	74.69	121	16.95	162	

Note: ^a Statistical significance reflects comparisons across all demographics (*N* = 1,014). ^b Gender is reported as male and female; due to cell size, nonspecified gender is excluded. Statistical significance reflects comparisons across all demographics (*n* = 776).

p* < 0.05. *p* < 0.01.

Table 7*Fall 2018 African First-Year Admits – SIR No Destination*

SIR-No College Destination	%	<i>n</i>	
University of California (UC) Campus ^a	35.82	279	**
California State University (CSU)	7.57	59	**
4-Year California (CA) ^b	11.04	86	**
2-Year California	2.57	20	**
Historically Black College/University (HBCU) ^c	2.7	21	
Out-of-State	32.35	252	**
No College	7.96	62	

Note: Number of students = 1,041

^a Excludes students who enrolled at UC Davis based on National Student Clearinghouse data.

Enrollment numbers at other UC campuses are as follows Los Angeles ($n = 101$), Berkeley ($n = 67$), Santa Barbara ($n = 37$), Irvine ($n = 29$), San Diego ($N = 28$), and Riverside, Santa Cruz, and Merced ($N = 17$). The n for UCR, UCSC, and UCM was less than 10 for each campus. ^b Excludes UC and CSU. ^c Excludes HBCUs. Due to the small cell size, 2-year out-of-state is included in the out-of-state total.

** $p < 0.01$

SIR-No admits who did not enroll at a college/university in the fall. These findings are presented in Table 7. Of the 779 African American first-year admits who did not submit an SIR, the majority enrolled at a different UC campus (35.82%; $n = 279$). UCLA had the highest enrollment of SIR-Nos followed by UC Berkeley. UC Santa Barbara yielded the next largest number of SIR-Nos followed by UC San Diego and UC Irvine, which had the same yield rates. Next to UC campuses, Black first-year admits who declined their offer of admission chose to enroll at an out-of-state college/university at close to the rate of those who attended a UC campus (32.35%; $n = 252$). Although at a much lower rate of 11% ($n = 86$), a fairly large number of students enrolled at a nonpublic CA 4-year college/university. Less than 8% of all SIR-Nos

enrolled at a CSU campus. Additionally, while the number is small, it is important to note that just under 3% of Black students enrolled at an HBCU. Similarly, 2.57% ($n = 20$) enrolled at a CA 2-year college. This is an indication that the biggest competitors for UCD are other UC campuses, yet out-of-state institutions are aggressively recruiting and yielding Black students at a particularly high rate.

Outside of the UC system, the 4-year colleges/universities with the highest enrollment of Black students who were SIR-No include the University of Southern California, Stanford, San Diego State University, and California Polytechnic State University. Other popular SIR-No destinations, albeit smaller in numbers, include Arizona State University, Cornell University, Howard University, Pepperdine University, New York University, Northwestern University, University of Pennsylvania, and Washington University.

SIR-No Survey Results

The final portion of my findings focused on the research question exploring the SIR-No survey results. Students who were admitted and declined their offer by notifying the University through the student portal MyAdmissions were invited to complete a survey aimed at allowing the University to better understand why they decided not to enroll. Students were requested to respond to six questions. The first two questions addressed where students decided to enroll if not UC Davis. In lieu of these responses, I present NSC data indicating where students enrolled other than UC Davis. A second question focused on other plans that students have if they indicated that they would not attend a 4-year university. Given that most students do choose to enroll in a college or university, the responses were not substantial enough to report on. My findings focused on the remaining four questions.

I begin with reasons why students chose not to attend UC Davis. As outlined in Table 8, 133 students responded to this question of why they did not attend UCD. Students could select more than one option which resulted in a total of 281 responses, of which the dominant reason indicated was receiving a better financial aid/scholarship package with 23.49% ($n = 66$) of responses. The next

predominant reasons indicated were cost and location, each reflecting 17.44% ($n = 49$) of all responses. Personal circumstances represented 13.17% ($n = 37$) of all responses. The school's reputation and rankings each accounted for nearly 8% of responses. Finally, just over 5% ($n = 15$) collectively indicated campus safety, the major not being available, and other as the reasons they opted for another institution.

Students were also asked to rank UC Davis in comparison with the other universities they considered, with 1 being the highest and 5 being the lowest. Table 9 reflects the findings of how Black SIR-No admits ranked UCD. Of the 134 respondents, UCD was not the top choice for most students with approximately 8% ranking UC Davis in first place. Of all respondents, 26% ranked UCD in third place and another 26% ranked UCD in fifth place. Approximately 21% of SIR-Nos ranked UCD as their second choice. An additional 13 respondents selected "other" and provided comments. Most of those responses indicated that UCD was not highly ranked among the other schools considered by the students, ranking the campus lower than the five options available.

To better understand what role the campus visit played for students who decided not to attend UC Davis, respondents were asked to indicate whether they visited the campus before making their decision. Those who indicated yes were prompted to specify the type of visit. Of the 149 respondents, 71.81% ($n = 107$) indicated that they did visit the campus before making their decision. Students were then prompted to indicate the type of visit. The top three visit types were visiting the Welcome Center, attending a campus event, and taking a tour. Among the students who indicated attending a campus event, nearly 50% reported participating in Decision Day or a connected event such as Aggie Senior Weekend and African American Experience. A small number of students also reported attending Picnic Day.

Table 8*Reason for Not Attending UC Davis*

Please indicate why you chose not to attend UC Davis (Check all that apply)	<i>n</i>	%
Offered a better financial aid/scholarship package	66	49.62
Cost	49	36.84
Location	49	36.84
Personal circumstances	37	27.82
Reputation	23	17.29
Rankings	22	16.54
Academic quality	20	15.04
Campus safety concerns; Major not available; None of the above	15	11.28

Note: Responses are not mutually exclusive. Total number of respondents $N = 133$; total responses $n = 281$.

Table 9*UCD Ranking*

How did you rank UC Davis among your university choices? Other, please specify:		
UCD Rank	<i>n</i>	%
1	11	8.21
2	29	21.64
3	36	26.87
4	23	17.16
5	35	26.12

Note: Total responses $n = 134$

(See Appendices 7–8 for additional tables)

Finally, the survey asked students for their final thoughts, open response (n = 41 among the 165 admits who completed the SIR-No survey included a response). Responses very much paralleled the indicators first reported. Specifically, prioritizing financial reasons and costs, some students reported not having the funds to cover the cost of attendance. Example responses are provided as follows:

- “While I love the community and am greatly appreciative of the honor of being accepted, I simply will not have the funds to repay the loans required to attend UC Davis.” – Out-of-State (includes any students attending school internationally)
- “Thank you much for accepting me. Unfortunately, the financial offer was not enough to consider attending.” – Out-of-State
- “Thank you for accepting me, but as an out-of-state student, I basically got nothing from the financial aid package.” – Out-of-State

Responses were also parallel to much that was reported related to location. Examples are as follows:

- “I am thankful for the acceptance of UC Davis. Due to location issues and costs, I must decline the offer.” – SoCal
- “I have heard many great things about UC Davis in terms of academics and college life. I have just decided to attend a university closer to home.” – SoCal
- “The location was simply too far to take into consideration to attend.” – SoCal

Discussion: Research Question 1

These findings point to a few key insights. First, the campus does fairly well in yielding Black students from the local region. This is consistent with the 2020 UC accountability report, which noted that in fall 2019, UC campuses collectively enrolled students who lived in nearby regions within a 50-mile radius of their campuses at a rate of 36% (University of California, 2020). Yet, the campus also does well in attracting Black students in California from outside of the local region. This statistical analysis

reveals how the campus fares when it comes to enrolling Black students from certain regions of the state.

Another crucial finding was focused on how Black students rank the campus. Based on the data available from the fall 2018 SIR-No survey, UC Davis was not ranked high, with only 8% of Black freshman respondents ranking it as their number one choice – a finding consistent with the qualitative work I present in Chapter 6; that is, among the seven students I interviewed, none of them rated the campus as their number one choice. Survey outcomes also pointed to the importance of visiting the campus, including tours and events; over 70% of survey respondents visited the campus primarily to tour and/or to attend a yield event. This is aligned with national recruitment trends and strategies. According to the National Association of College Admissions Counselors (NACAC) 2018 State of College Admissions report, among the top recruitment strategies for attracting first-time freshmen, the top three strategies were email, website, and campus visits. Additionally, at least 50% of colleges surveyed for this report rated hosting campus visits, outreach to parents and high school counselors, high school visits, and college fairs as considerably important (Clinedinst & Patel, 2018). Another key finding from this section was that UC Davis does a good job of attracting Black students from outside of California.

While most of the campuses' target recruitment efforts at attracting Black students have historically been focused in California, prospective African American freshmen from other states are learning about the campus and are interested enough to apply. However, as the data indicated, yielding these students has been a challenge. Notably, the yield rate of Black freshman admits from Los Angeles is just as low as that of out-of-state Black freshmen. Given that Los Angeles County is home to the largest Black population in the state with high numbers of Black high school graduates completing college preparation courses (The Campaign for College Opportunity, 2019, pp. 7-8), there is an opportunity for the campus to increase its enrollment among students from this region. To do so, we must better understand why Black freshman admits from the greater Los Angeles area and other regions

in Southern CA are declining their admission at such a high rate. An additional key finding from my analysis is that when the combined characteristics of parent education and income level of Black freshman applicants were considered, those who are neither first-gen nor low-income comprised the largest portion of the admit pool; however, they accounted for the highest portion of SIR-Nos among all black first-year admits for fall 2018. Subsequent chapters explore how students are making their decisions, including considerations of cost and affordability.

According to the UC Info Center's freshman fall admissions summary, across the UC system the African American freshman yield remained steady at approximately 43% from fall 2017 to fall 2018 followed by a steady decrease of 3 percentage points consecutively in fall 2019 (40%) and fall 2020 (37%). By contrast, the same report revealed that UC Davis experienced an increase in African American freshman enrollment between fall 2017 (21%) and fall 2018 (23%). However, while the decline was not as steep as systemwide trends, UC Davis subsequently saw a decrease in the yield rate of Black freshman, moving from 22% in fall 2019 to 20% in fall 20 (UC Info Center). Overall, we know that national trends point to African Americans still being underrepresented in higher education across the nation, with Black and Latino males being significantly underrepresented. If we are to move the dial and address disparities in representation it is critical to delve deeper into why such a high percentage of admitted students decide not to enroll at a top-ranked research university such as UC Davis.

In the next chapter, I go into more detail regarding students' perceptions of the campus, how they viewed the campus compared with their other options and the institution they decided to attend, and what influenced their perceptions; furthermore, I explore other important considerations in their decision-making process including the role of the campus visit and cost.

Chapter 6 - Findings: Research Question 2 Part A – Participant Profiles

This chapter focuses on the results of my qualitative inquiry. The purpose of the interviews was to understand what experiences influence the decision of African American first-year students admitted to UC Davis to not accept their admissions offer. I begin by introducing the study participants, including participants' demographic characteristics along with the general academic profile of each student. The participant profiles of each interviewed student are followed by a synthesis of the key themes, which consist of four primary areas: (1) Cost and Affordability; (2) Academics and Career; (3) Key Influencers; and (4) Climate, Community, and Connection. I conclude with a summary of my overall findings and recommendations.

Profile of the Participant Group

The seven students interviewed were all from California with four students from the Sacramento region and the remaining three distributed throughout the state across the San Francisco Bay, LA, and San Diego areas. All of these regions have a fairly high African American population with LA having the highest statewide. In terms of major, four students applied to a major in the College of L&S (UC Davis' largest College), whereas the remaining three were evenly distributed between the other three Colleges that offer undergraduate majors. Two students were first-gen and low-income. The five remaining students were neither first-gen nor low-income. Four students identified as female, half of whom came from the local region. Three students identified as male, two of whom came from the local region. In terms of school type, only one student attended a private high school. The last school of attendance for all others was a public high school, none of which were LCFF+ schools (i.e., schools serving high concentrations of low-income students). Tables 10 and 11 provide an overview of the students, where they come from, demographic characteristics, and the major they applied to at UC Davis.

Table 10*Student Profile – Demographics and School Profile*

Pseudonym	Sex	Income	First-Gen Status	Region	School County
Rico	Male	Low-Income	First Gen	Sacramento	Yolo
Tammy	Female	Not Low- Income	Not First Gen	Sacramento	Sacramento
Keisha	Female	Not Low- Income	Not First Gen	Sacramento	Sacramento
Nate	Male	Not Low- Income	Not First Gen	Sacramento	Sacramento
Sean	Male	Not Low- Income	Not First Gen	San Diego/ Imperial	San Diego
Briana	Female	Low-Income	First Gen	San Francisco/ Bay Area	Alameda^
Zakiyah	Female	Not Low- Income	Not First Gen	Los Angeles	Los Angeles

Note: None of the students interviewed attend an LCFF+ school. All but one attended a public school. All interviewees lived in the county where their school is located.

^ Private high school

Table 11*Student Profile – Major and College*

Pseudonym	Major	College	University Enrolled
Rico	Political Science	Letters and Science	Ivy League
Tammy	Psychology	Letters and Science	HBCU
Keisha	Marine and Coastal Science^	Biological Sciences	UC San Diego
Nate	Electrical Engineering^	Engineering	UC Berkeley
Sean	Political Science	Letters and Science	UC Los Angeles
Briana	History	Letters and Science	UC Los Angeles
Zakiyah	Agric & Environ Education^	Agricultural and Environmental Sciences	HBCU

Note: One student did not apply for a STEM major but wanted to pursue a career in STEM (pre-med).

^ STEM major

Participant Portraits

Rico. The first student I interviewed was from the Sacramento area and will be the first in his family to obtain a 4-year degree. Rico identified as male and came from a low-income family. He graduated from a local high school to which he transferred for his senior year after attending another public high school in Sacramento for the 9th–11th grades. Rico applied to UC Davis in the College of Letters and Sciences in political science. He decided to enroll at a 4-year out-of-state Ivy league University in the New England region. During his high school career, Rico participated in two academic preparation programs that were focused on helping students from underserved and marginalized

communities go to college, namely the Early Academic Outreach Program (EAOP) and College Track. UC Davis was one of the top schools that he considered. In fact, UCD was among his top two choices, and prior to learning about his admission to the Ivy League, UC Davis was the main school he was considering.

As our interview progressed, Rico shared that he is a student athlete. This is something that appeared to be important to him but was not the driver in terms of his identity. In fact, he only brought this up to provide some context related to his campus visit and the timing of his decision. He explained that UCD was so high on his list because it was one of the first Division 1 schools to recruit him. He did go on an official visit to the university that he now attends and described the location and experience as “breathtaking and something new” as well as how the school “made it personalized for me.” While he did not talk about his family in detail, his responses provided a glimpse into how important family and community are to Rico; moreover, they offered insights into how going to college is not just about him but that the journey also involves his family – he wanted to be immersed in a community that considered their needs as well. He also shared how he felt highly supported in his decision concerning where to go to college by both sides of his family.

Rico significantly valued community, diversity, and a University environment that fosters a sense of family. In fact, Rico shared that the diversity at UCD was one of the reasons he really wanted to go to UC Davis. Something that really struck me about Rico was how much he wanted to leave his footprint on whatever institution he enrolled at. He spoke at great length about wanting to go to a school where he could grow and add value. Rico was very well-connected and leveraged his social capital networks between the outreach programs, athletics, the college counselor at his high school, directors of the outreach/academic preparation programs, and his circle of friends and their families to obtain the required information for helping his college choice process. Rico also had a great mentor, who is from the Sacramento area and also played college football, now professionally. Rico lit up with excitement

describing the way this mentor took time to advise him and not tell him what to do. Rather, he reflected on his own experience to give Rico some insights on what he would have done the same or different during college, and encouraged Rico to take full advantage of his college experience and take nothing for granted. While Rico did not specify his ethnicity, he did note this mentor by name, upon which I was able to determine that they too are an African American male who is committed to community, much the way Rico expressed his passion and commitment to positively contributing to his community and his goal of just being a good person. Rico appeared to be highly confident in taking the advice that was most helpful and applying it to best fit his circumstances and goals.

Rico received a full ride scholarship to his current institution, and he is looking forward to a new experience and spreading his wings.

Tammy. Tammy was the second student I interviewed. Tammy grew up in the Sacramento region and identifies as female. Both of her parents held a 4-year degree, and she was not low-income. UC Davis was a safe choice to apply to because she was not initially ready to go away to college. Tammy decided to enroll at an HBCU in the South ranked by U.S. News Best Colleges in the top five Regional Universities in the Midwest (US News, 2021). A large part of this decision was the academic program offered at this University being aligned with her career goal of enrolling in medical school. Another factor was wanting to be immersed in a larger Black community. Tammy grew up in an environment with few African Americans and saw just a handful of African Americans in her classes.

This experience had a significant impact on what Tammy valued in an institution of higher education and how she interacted with her peers. There were also some race-related incidents at her school that had an impact on her priorities for higher education, which I describe later in the presentation of themes. While Tammy said that she was not bullied, her collective experience being one of few Black students in her school environment placed her in a position where she felt that she was obligated to represent the diaspora. Tammy did not discuss her faith, but from our discussion she did

allude to it being important to her, and more so the importance of the various facets of a person's identity being respected and valued, all of which ultimately factored into her decision to attend an HBCU.

Tammy was a high-performing student, and although she did not use the specific terminology, she was aware that she was determined to be ELC, describing that she was in the top 10% of her school (this would actually be the top 9% but she got the concept) and knew she would be guaranteed a space at one UC campus even if not the one of her choice. Along with UCD, Tammy applied to UCLA, UCI, and UCSB. Tammy was also considering Sacramento State and felt that UC Davis was the top contender between these two institutions. Additionally, she participated in high school sports, in particular playing volleyball for all 4 years of high school. Along with her school environment, Tammy was also highly concerned with how Universities were responding to COVID-19, specifically how they were addressing this global health pandemic to keep students safe along with how and when those plans were communicated to future students such as herself.

Tammy was very direct and forthcoming in her perspective on her experience of being engaged by UC Davis. She was concerned with what her experience as a Black student at a PWI would be like and viewed UCD as having a predominantly white and Asian student body. Diversity and inclusion were critical to Tammy. In fact, she described wanting to be in an environment where she felt "culturally comfortable" and prioritized this criterion above other aspects. Tammy viewed UC Davis as a good school, and had many positive things to say about the campus; she was also proactive in attending on-campus activities such as sports games and embraced the campus culture. Overall, she held the UC system in high regard in terms of how prepared she would be for her future, stating that "...everybody in California knows if you go to a UC you're good, you're set!" Unlike many of her peers, Tammy did not have a social media account during high school and only established a social media presence once she decided where to enroll for college.

Tammy was highly inquisitive and had some closing questions for me as the researcher. In particular, she wanted to know what my doctorate was in, what I plan to do with my degree, and where I completed my undergraduate studies. I did respond to her questions, and her closing question was whether I regretted attending the school where I received my undergraduate degree from, citing the reason for her question as her mother being a medical doctor who attended a public university in California for her undergraduate and a public university out-of-state for medical school; her mother had shared that if she had to do it over again, she would have attended an HBCU.

Keisha. Keisha was the third student I interviewed. She was also from the local region, something that she was very proud of, and attended a public high school in Sacramento County. Both of her parents held a college degree, and she was not low-income. As a STEM major, she was highly passionate about marine biology and applied as a Marine and Coastal Science major at UC Davis. Keisha decided to enroll at UC San Diego as she felt that it was a better fit related to her major and also because she wanted to travel a bit further from home. Keisha lived in an area where many companies such as Intel and Kaiser are based. She was also very proud of the impactful ways that UCD is helping the community, especially in the medical field, which she had more direct knowledge about and felt should be promoted more given her experiences as a part of UC Davis Health. Keisha greatly valued campus diversity and was active in the Black Student Union (BSU) at her high school. Extremely important to her were attending an institution where she could learn from others with different experiences as well as being able to turn to people who had similar experiences. Among the aspects of diversity most important to Keisha was religious diversity, which she viewed as a means to learn more about the society and one another's differences.

Academically, Keisha valued obtaining information on what types of AP classes and AP exams to take in order to obtain college credit upon entry into a University, given her academic goals. It was evident from our interview that Keisha was a planner, and she expressed several times the importance

of getting as much information as she could as early as possible to prepare in advance for her future. Keisha valued the opportunity to conduct undergraduate research, participating in internships and other resources that will support successful entry into graduate school. Keisha was well-rounded, and along with participation in her school's BSU, she was also involved in sports at her school and in the community, through which she was able to obtain more information about other facets of college life that she valued. As Keisha stated, "[i]t's good to get just experiences that aren't completely academic.... extracurriculars like sports as well, because that is an important part of college that isn't talked about much."

In addition, Keisha talked a great deal about how she was able to access information, and she had genuine concern for those who did not have the opportunity to access this information in the same manner. She shared several ways that the University could help address this in order to have a broader reach to more students, including on social media, which she and her peers use frequently. This reflects Keisha's expressed commitment to helping future generations of students, particularly from the African diaspora, obtain greater exposure to universities such as UC Davis, with direct and personalized interactions that allow them to truly feel connected and have a sense of place and belonging. While she observed pressure among her peer group to attend a college/university that was socially accepted and defined by her peers to be a great school, Keisha was very clear in that she did not make decisions based on the opinions of others nor stereotypes that her peers may place on certain institutions. She was confident in owning her space and making choices for her future that best aligned with her goals and values.

Nate. Nate was an African American male from the Sacramento region and attended a public high school in Sacramento County. He spent much of his adolescence in Davis, CA attending a portion of elementary and all of middle school in the City of Davis. He shared how he has "been at UC Davis for more years than some of the people going there" and knew the campus very well as a result. Both

Nate's mother and father held advanced degrees and during high school he was actively involved in two key outreach programs, one program of which was focused on high school students in the region interested in STEM, known as the Summer Math and Science Honors academy (SMASH), and the other was Sacramento Area Youth Speaks (SAYS). These programs had been instrumental in his exposure to UC Davis and higher education. Nate was an electrical engineering major and the primary driver of where he decided to enroll for college was the rankings of the engineering program at the respective Universities he was considering. Nate participated in multiple tours at UC Davis, so he understood the campus and the financial aid very well; he talked to many students through SMASH and felt that he had a deeper understanding of all that the campus had available.

His overall perception of the campus was positive. However, he described some racially charged experiences of growing up in the community that had left a negative impression. These included Nate's experiences of being profiled and targeted as an adolescent attending school in the city of Davis as the only black student in his classes, derogatory encounters he endured from classmates, and some less-than-positive experiences in the city of Davis while participating in SMASH, a program comprising many students of color. Despite these experiences, Nate applied for admission to UC Davis, a campus that was not his top choice but that he included in his UC application as he had a fee waiver, which allowed him to apply to multiple campuses at no cost. Nate is an exceptional scholar, and while confident in his skills and talents, he was also very humble and cared significantly about helping students of color and those from marginalized communities to access higher education. As a scholar, the range of schools that Nate considered included UC Berkeley, Stanford, MIT, and Georgia Tech. He also became the first student in his school district to be admitted to a distinguished Ivy as part of their early decision program. Ultimately, he decided to attend UC Berkeley.

Nate's passion for having greater diversity and representation of African American students enrolled at universities such as UC Davis was evident. Even as Nate noted the way he was celebrated for

obtaining admission to this distinctive Ivy League institution, he connected it back to how the University could and should celebrate students who are admitted and make sure that they genuinely feel wanted. He also offered a significant number of recommendations for how the campus could reach out to more Black students and communities of color. During our interview, he focused on helping the University attract more students like himself and his peers. Nate was also clear on his career goals and plans to begin work as a project manager immediately after obtaining his undergraduate degree. He was highly proactive in his college search process and took advantage of all resources available. He appeared highly poised as it relates to his college choices and the entire process.

Sean. The next student I interviewed was Sean, who identified as male and biracial, noting that his mom is Filipino and his dad is Jamaican. He was from outside of the local region and attended a public high school in San Diego County. Sean lives with his mother and during certain times of the year visits his father, who lives out-of-state. Both of his parents held a 4-year degree, and he was not low-income. He applied to UC Davis in political science and was exploring careers in law and teaching. It appeared from this interview that Sean and his mom had a strong bond, and she was very supportive and proactively involved in his college search process. His mom also warmly chimed in with Sean a few times during our interview if there were particular bits of information she felt were important and wanted to make sure he shared with me. Sean was highly personable, outgoing, and full of excitement during our interview. Sean enrolled at his first-choice college, UCLA, which he had held aspirations of attending for a long time. However, UC Davis was still one of the top schools that he considered.

Sean worked, and although he did not say for how long, it appeared that he has been working for longer than his senior year based on his description of having worked at one restaurant and then later another where he currently works. He did not indicate that this was due to any financial hardship or needing to help with bills. UCLA's proximity to his current job at a large fast-food chain, Restaurant

A,⁹ was a bonus for him as he noted that it would be convenient for him to transfer, so he was planning to continue working in college. Interestingly, as he described the convenient location of his workplace being near the UCLA campus, it was clear he was not aware of this same restaurant chain being located in Davis near the campus. I do not know whether this would have changed his perspective on the campus but being able to continue working with this company during high school seemed to be an important consideration.

Sean grew up in a small community. He was looking forward to a different experience and going to college in a new location. Sean described himself as having grown up in a white neighborhood and having attended a predominantly white school in a small town. He had a highly optimistic approach to applying to college, which was to apply to multiple campuses and see where things landed. Sean was highly personable and seemed to have a strong social circle and network of friends and coworkers. He was also well supported at high school and brought great energy to our discussion. Sean was appreciative of this research, expressed being quite fond of UC Davis, and viewed this study as a way to help the community. In some of his closing comments, he shared some encouraging remarks aimed at the UC Davis campus to continue enrolling students and hiring staff who support an inclusive and welcoming environment. Sean's mom also hopped in the background to send a friendly farewell.

Just with Davis, I guess, keep finding really cool students and staff, that make people want to be a part of the family. I appreciate that even after I declined admission, I guess, not that you guys are trying to bring me in, but I guess there's still some, gosh, what's the word? Interaction with the school. I'm glad I got this opportunity to help you guys.....Like I said, I'm very appreciative of you trying to figure things out and help us, also good luck in all of your personal endeavors. My mom enjoying herself from background.

⁹ This is a pseudonym for Sean's current place of employment.

Briana. Briana identified as female, will be the first in her family to obtain a 4-year degree, and attended a private high school in the San Francisco Bay Area. As a low-income student, cost and affordability were critical factors in her decision of where to enroll. Briana did not participate in any educational preparation programs, noting that she attended a College Preparatory school, so she had the necessary college counseling and related support. This included a significant amount of support from her college counselor and two of her favorite teachers. Briana leaned into all of these support networks, and that included her circle of friends who she reached out to when she needed help through her process of deciding where to enroll.

Briana was a biology major and intends to go to medical school after obtaining her undergraduate degree. In total, she applied to nearly 30 colleges and universities, including all of the UC campuses, and narrowed her choices of where to enroll down to three: UCLA, UC Berkeley, and Johns Hopkins University. UCLA had always been Briana's dream school and that is where she enrolled. She had clear career goals and was quite focused on academic support for biology students, research opportunities, and access to labs in college to support her educational trajectory during college.

In addition to her goals around pre-medicine, Briana was very passionate about her involvement in the BSU at her high school, through which she was able to tour UC Davis. Regarding any university she was considering, Briana was extremely vocal and detailed about the importance of those institutions having an active BSU and other student organizations and communities that embody the African diaspora and being well supported. Briana also provided several thoughtful recommendations on things UC Davis did that she found most helpful and could be expanded, along with what the campus could do better to reach more Black students.

Zakiyah. The last student that I interviewed was Zakiyah. She attended a public high school in Los Angeles County. Zakiyah was a pre-med student and applied to UC Davis in Agriculture and Environmental Education. She was not low-income nor first-gen. Both of her parents attended UC Davis,

and while they did not graduate from the campus, there appeared to be a strong affinity for the University. This was one of the main reasons she applied along with it being her safety school; she described UCD as the school she would have gone to if not admitted to any of her top schools. Her number one choice was a very well-known HBCU to which she was admitted and decided to attend. She was admitted to the university through their Early Decision process and decided to attend as soon as she received her admissions offer because it was her number one choice. Yet, Zakiyah still kept her options open and waited a couple of months rather than committing right away so she could weigh out other admission offers.

Although Zakiyah lived in LA, she was born in Davis and lived there when she was younger. She also had family that lived close to the UC Davis campus. She attended a high school that was primarily Latino with few African Americans. Along with her willingness to speak with me, Zakiyah also responded to the SIR-No survey administered by the Office of Admissions. Zakiyah was accustomed to and desired to attend a college that was in a faster-paced environment, even if not quite up to the speed of LA. Zakiyah was also looking forward to studying abroad during college and noted how COVID may prevent that from becoming a reality. She leveraged several online platforms to research scholarships and learn more about various universities. However, her largest source of information came from her networks in church. Zakiyah did not talk much about her faith but she did share how her church played a pivotal role in her college choice process. This faith-based community, as I describe in a later section, consisted of HBCU alumni, church leaders, and others who connected Zakiyah with currently enrolled HBCU students along with other resources.

Chapter 7 - Findings: Research Question 2 Part 2 – Themes

In this chapter, I describe the key themes from the qualitative findings, specifically where student experiences intersect with their college choice process. The four major themes include Cost and Affordability, Academic Reputation and Career Aspirations, Key Influencers, and finally Community Climate and Connection. I begin with cost which I've categorized into the five sub-themes: affordability as a driving factor, affordability not a concern, access to and timing of information on aid, consistent and frequent information, and lastly awareness of scholarships and ways to pay for college.

Theme 1: Cost and Affordability

"[T]he initial cost can be a bit scary for people when they don't realize that there are a lot of opportunities for financial aid and scholarships." – Keisha

Cost was a predominant theme for all of the students I interviewed. Approximately half of the students identified cost and affordability as a driving factor in their decision not to enroll at UC Davis. For the remaining half, there were other factors more important than cost in their decision not to enroll at UC Davis. I will begin with students who shared that cost was not a concern.

Affordability – A Driving Factor

Of the three students who identified cost as extremely important (Rico, Tammy and Briana), two opted to attend an out-of-state university, and the other would be relocating from the San Francisco Bay Area to LA. Each student decided not to attend UC Davis in part because of the cost, although their particular reasons varied. For Rico, the primary factor in his decision not to attend UC Davis was the uncertainty surrounding costs and finances. He was offered a "full ride" at the Ivy League institution he ultimately selected. By contrast, UCD offered what Rico described as a decent package with the possibility of additional scholarship money to come after he enrolled. This level of uncertainty in financial stability was an aspect that left Rico very uncomfortable.

Cost and scholarships were a driving factor in Tammy's decision to attend the HBCU she selected, where she received a full academic scholarship. Tammy shared that the in-state tuition she would have to pay at UC Davis was good, but in terms of additional financial support, she was looking for scholarships or at least the opportunity to apply for scholarships specific to UC Davis. Tammy was averse to taking out loans, which she associated with impacting her ability to go to professional school, sharing the following: "I want to go to medical school I don't want to take out loans for undergrad so that's basically what it came down to." For Briana, who like Rico came from a low-income household, cost was "super important" and a big aspect in her decision-making process. The quality of the aid offer was of significance for both students. Briana determined that the aid package offered was not going to work for her and her family. In particular, the expected family contribution made the financial aid package offered at UCD less than appealing. There was too much in terms of what would be expected for her family to cover and take out in loans.

Affordability – Not a Concern

Among the four students for whom cost was not an issue, three enrolled at another UC campus. They included Sean who enrolled at UCLA, Nate who was attending UCB, and Keisha who is now at UCSD. Zakiyah enrolled at HBCU2, ¹⁰ which is outside of California and did not weigh cost as the determining factor in her decision. While all four students shared a similar response, their reasons varied quite a lot and fell into one of the following areas: (1) Received great financial offers at UCD and elsewhere; (2) had the ability to cover education cost through other means; (3) only considered UCs and thus cost was comparable; and (4) UCD was more affordable but there was a driving factor more important than cost. In all instances, for this group of students UCD offered an equivalent or better offer than the other institutions they were considering. This neutralized their concerns about cost and

¹⁰ Pseudonym for the University at which Zakiyah is enrolled.

allowed the students to focus on other factors that served as a higher priority in their decision of where to enroll.

For Zakiyah, attending UC Davis would have been the most affordable option as she received a generous financial aid package from the campus. However, the community and climate that she was seeking were the driving factor and far outweighed the additional financial investment she would have had to commit to attend the school outside of California at HBCU2 where she ultimately enrolled. Zakiyah described UCD as a perfect school for her except that it did not have a large enough black community.

Sean, on the other hand, knew his education would be covered through his father's veteran benefits and other support through financial aid. As such, he did not give much focus to paying for college.

Cost was not a driving factor in Nate's final decision of where to attend given that he received aid offers that covered his full costs at the various institutions he was strongly considering. If these other universities had not provided a full ride, cost may have been a greater consideration for Nate. He described this as follows:

For me, it's a little bit different because I got a full ride basically everywhere I go, so if I [did not get] a full ride somewhere else, but I got a full ride to Davis, I think that would have made me decide more whether or not to go to Davis. I think cost was a big thing and...to get to go without any debt.

By contrast, Keisha was only considering attending UC campuses where the costs were similar. As such, she could focus on what her future experience at the school would be. She described this as follows:

Because, I was just narrowing it down between UCs the cost wasn't insanely important to me. I just figured if I'm really, really happy at a school, we'll do our best to find a way and pay for it as long as I know that this is going to be an amazing 4-year experience, and I'm going to get what I need out of it.

Keisha's assessment in terms of cost had a lot to do with obtaining a great deal of information from UC Davis on the cost breakdown, which was extremely helpful in understanding how much she would have to pay for various expenses such as tuition, books, and housing along with where she could save on cost. As an example, she compared what her true cost would be if she attended UC Davis and stayed at home rather than lived on campus. Both Keisha and Nate extensively researched cost on their own, and Keisha also reviewed the information that UC Davis provided, which she felt was highly comprehensive. In all instances, the students for whom cost was not as much of a concern indicated that they either received solid aid offers from UCD and all other institutions they were considering, or they had other means of covering their education expenses, which took the pressure of paying for college off their shoulders.

Access to Aid Information and Timing

Timing of the financial aid offer was another crucial element for students. This included not only when they received information but also what information was provided. For example, the Ivy League Rico decided to attend was one of the first universities to get back to him with a financial aid offer. Rico knew that he qualified for the Blue & Gold Scholarship at UCD and would be "getting money for FAFSA" and felt that he would have been okay at UCD financially, but the lack of certainty about how he'd cover any unmet needs was unsettling. Rico described how not knowing whether he would be fully financed meant planning for the rest of the year based on the level of aid he was confirmed to receive. This "would have been more confusing" in terms of how he paid for his UCD education. Similarly, the timing of the aid offer made a difference for Briana who was extremely excited when she received her admissions offer from Davis. She then received her financial aid offer a few days later, and it was slightly deflating because she had realized that the aid package was not going to work for her. There was this build-up of excitement when she received her admissions offer followed by a bit of a let-down when she got the financial aid offer and realized that it was not ideal. UCD was one of the first campuses to admit Briana and get her financial aid offer to her. However, there were a few schools that notified Briana of

her admissions with her aid offer and those offers were better. She felt that it would have been better to get the same information at the same time so that she could assess whether she could make it work.

Tammy did not see any information on scholarships or grants being offered from UCD. She described herself as being “well off” and as a result was not expecting to get much money in need-based aid, and she knew that she didn’t qualify based on her FAFSA. However, being presented with the opportunities to apply for scholarships from UCD would have been helpful. Tammy did not recall receiving any information from FAS beyond “here’s your financial aid statement, sorry we can’t give you much.” Again, she was not expecting much aid but also did not get much information that was helpful about merit-based scholarships. Rico also shared that he “didn’t receive any proper information regarding financial [aid] and scholarships” but later shared that he was pretty sure he may have gotten the financial aid package. However, Rico declined his admissions offer to UCD before he saw the package so that he could “leave that enrollment spot for someone else.” In terms of financial aid for a student athlete, with football Rico said it was “a blessing that he was able to have offers from the Ivy leagues in October or November” because once he had those offers, he was able to take that information to financial aid and obtain the assistance he required. Yet, Rico shared that even with the earlier timing of these aid offers, he still applied to eight UC campuses and other CSU campuses, which kept his options open.

Consistent and Frequent Information

Among all interviewees, the timing of when information was received was critical. This included obtaining more frequent information on financial aid while applying for admissions, as well as once they were admitted. Briana’s recommendation summed up what many students shared, namely needing more consistent information more frequently on the financial aid process, options for paying, scholarships, and what the true estimated cost would be. Furthermore, in terms of emails, Briana

recommended splitting the information into different email messages as the content is quite detailed and stated that receiving that information all at once was overwhelming to her.

Awareness of Scholarships and Ways to Pay

Several students found that the information they were seeking and/or that was most helpful related to cost was readily available, while approximately half felt that more information was required, particularly on scholarships and other opportunities. Nate conducted his own extensive research and Keisha indicated that she did some on her own. Sean did not indicate performing extensive research given that he knew how his education would be covered. Zakiyah also appeared to have enough information to determine that UC Davis was her most cost-effective option.

For Tammy, the information that would have been most helpful was on scholarship and work-study opportunities. Tammy felt that given how close she was to the campus, this information was not as readily available as it should have been. While a representative did come to her school, she also felt there should have been more outreach, which would have been helpful in making her decision. Tammy shared that more scholarship opportunities directly from UC Davis would have been very helpful, noting how Sacramento State, another school she considered, constantly provided her with scholarship or grant opportunities to apply to. Tammy shared that it “would’ve been nice to see more ways to pay because I mean it is still kind of expensive to go there,” and that this information would have been most helpful when she was applying for admission, but also after she applied, stating that “there’s still time to do scholarships whenever you make time.” Tammy was aware of scholarships throughout California and for UC, but she wanted to see scholarships specifically to UC Davis. Nate felt well-versed in what scholarships and funding were available, yet also recommended that more information be provided to students about any scholarships potentially available should they decide to attend UC Davis. He noted how this would be a helpful resource for attracting students while they are applying as well as once they are admitted.

Most students did their own research online to obtain the information that they were seeking. None of the interviewees participated in any information sessions offered by the campus on FAS. They obtained information on their own, relying on the information that was communicated to them. One student, Keisha, came across Niche when searching online for scholarships, and obtaining information about that topic led her to more information on searching about colleges and universities in general. Nate leveraged the resources on the UC website rather than participating in any information sessions offered by Financial Aid. He found that the best information on the UC website was the cost estimator and shared how it took the worry out of the equation even if the estimates were not completely accurate, as it allowed students to gauge what their true cost might be.

I feel like that was probably some of the best information that I could have got. And it was really easy for me, even though it's not a hundred percent accurate, I can still gauge like, 'Okay, I may be spending this much this at this school. I may be spending this much at another school.' And it takes the worry out of that equation.

For the students who participated in academic preparation programs, based on the goals and objectives of these programs, it is likely they received some financial aid information as part of the programming itself. Nate was the only student who mentioned being aware of scholarships as well as that this was communicated through the program he participated in rather than other formal channels on behalf of the campus.

One scholarship that Nate mentioned was the Walter Robinson Scholarship through the UC Davis SMASH academy. He described his awareness of cost as follows:

Yeah, well, prior to applying, I just knew about the Walter Robinson scholarship and that's because of being in SMASH. And then I knew about, from my school, I knew about the Cal grants and I also did some of those estimated cost of attendance for UC. So, I did a lot of those just

trying to figure out like how much or if I'm going to have to pay anything, just for as far as financial aid goes. So, I did a lot of research on that.

Keisha's one suggestion on additional information that would be helpful was to provide people with the range of what they'd actually have to pay.

I thought it was very comprehensive and I got a lot of information. Maybe just giving ranges about, 'Yes, this is how much it's going to cost, but there are some people who pay less than half of that,' and just how that ends up happening. Because the initial total cost can be a bit scary for people when they don't realize that there are a lot of opportunities for financial aid and scholarships.

Based on her description, it appeared that she was referring to obtaining the net price, which aligned with the cost estimator that Nate found so useful. Briana also wished that there was more outreach from the campus on paying for college. The information she received about costs and paying for college was limited. Unlike some of her peers, the most helpful information she received was about scholarships, but she was still seeking more information specifically on "affording a UC Davis education." She recalled receiving one email on scholarships and not much else. In alignment with many of the other student recommendations, Briana strongly suggested that the University provide more consistent and clearer information regarding college financing and aid possibilities.

Discussion: Cost and Affordability

The foundational study conducted on African American students who decline to enroll at UC (Contreras et al., 2015) reported that many students were loan-averse, and many opted to attend what they perceived to be less expensive options to a UC campus, in particular a CSU and California Community College (CCC). However, only one student in my study spoke directly about not wanting to take out loans. All opted to go to a comparable – or what they considered to be a more competitive – 4-year university. I did find a similar trend in which several students obtained more scholarship

opportunities from the institutions they ultimately decided to attend, including one attending an Ivy League and another who was admitted to an Ivy League but opted for a more competitive UC campus. Yet, having the ability to pay and having a full understanding of all options available was quite important to the students in my study. Most were proactive in seeking this information, yet most also communicated that “you don’t know what you don’t know,” meaning if the information is not presented in a manner that is readily available to students and their families, they will base their decisions according to the limited information they can find.

Like several of the studies in my literature review surrounding student college choice (Griffin et al., 2012; Cabrera, 2016; Contreras et al., 2015; Wilbur, 2010), a clear theme on the role of cost was that further opportunities still exist for the University to communicate all options regarding cost and affordability more effectively, explain the financial aid process, and help students and families interpret their aid offers. This aligns with Hossler & Gallagher’s choice phase in which the student’s decision of where to enroll is greatly influenced by perceived or real impressions of cost and the corresponding available for the student to pay for college (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). Some students in my study, however, were clear on what the offer reflected, such as Nate, but felt that other students could benefit from more consistent and contextual information. Unlike the students in Griffin et al.’s study (2012), who placed affordability above the prestige of the school, the students in my study balanced these two elements. For half of the students, those secure in how they would cover their costs, greater value was placed on community and a sense of belonging. Prestige was a focus in the sense that the universities they decided to attend were either their first choice or ranked higher than UCD among their options. Thus, decisions were made with cost in mind, but also in alignment with other factors that they prioritized, such as diversity, as well as the academic and networking opportunities present that would lead them to their desired career goals. While most of the students I spoke with did not talk about finances from the perspective of not wanting to burden their family, one did share how the aid offer

from UCD was not going to work for her family. Another student indicated how the unknowns of receiving future aid/scholarships to cover unmet financial need created a significant amount of uncertainty that they were not comfortable with. In all instances, cost did appear to be an important factor for discussions on college choice. For some, given the funding options available, they did not have to worry about how they would pay for college. It was a burden that they would have carried if other means were not identified. For others, cost was among the highest considerations, if not the determining factor in their decision of where to enroll.

Theme 2: Academic Reputation and Career Aspirations

It wasn't anything that UC Davis did in particular that made me like, 'No, I don't want to go there.' As I told you, it was my second choice. It was just had to do with, I got a better offer here, and it was culturally better here. And the specific track I'm on, the psychology pre-med track. I don't think I would have gotten that same attention or specific training for what I want to do.

– Tammy

A second theme that aligned with college choice theory is students' career aspirations. This theme captures student perceptions of the academic opportunities and offerings at UC Davis, the campus rank and reputation, and how the specific major students wanted to pursue intersected with their career goals. The subthemes within this section can be categorized as follows: academic reputation, major, academic stereotypes, and preparation for future careers. For all students, their future career was a priority, although as I describe in this section, there were a variety of key influences that some students prioritized when making their decision regarding where to enroll.

Academic Reputation

Each student provided their perspective on the academic reputation and ranking of UC Davis compared with the college/university they decided to enroll at. For all seven of the interviewed students, UCD was not their first choice. Regarding academic reputation, during my interviews I asked

each student how they would rank UC Davis compared with the institution they decided to attend on a scale of 1–5, with 1 being the highest and 5 being the lowest. Nearly half ranked UCD as number 2 or 3 compared with the school they enrolled at (see Table 12). Academic reputation for Rico was associated with connections. He took a more neutral perspective regarding the overall academic quality of majors, but still ranked the campus as a 2 or a 3.

Table 12

UC Davis Rank Compared with Attending Institution

Student	UCD	University Enrolled	
	Rank	Rank	Name
Rico	2 or 3	1 or 2	Ivy^
Tammy	2	1	HBCU2^
Keisha*	No ranking	No ranking	UCSD
Nate	3 or 4	1	UCB
Sean	2	1	UCLA
Briana	2 or 3	1	UCLA
Zakiyah**	2	3	HBCU1^

Note: ^Pseudonym for institution of choice.

*Keisha is the only student who provided a response but did not give a specific ranking.

**Ranking reflects consideration of major only. When considering overall academics, Zakiyah ranked UCD 3 and her institution 2.

As Rico described:

I don't have too much knowledge in that regard. I definitely don't have a negative view. I want to say it's more neutral. I know the school is very good. I want to say it is ranked in the top 100 universities in America, so I mean I definitely know it's very good....In comparison to [Ivy League]? Probably like a three, or like a two or three. Because I mean just for me and I witnessed it first-hand, it's the connections that I'm getting in contact with at [Ivy League School] I mean it's amazing.

The academic ranking of UC Davis was high in Tammy's view. On a scale of 1–5, with 1 being the highest, Tammy ranked UCD as a 2. She shared many observations surrounding brand awareness, noting how the campus reputation in STEM was a big draw. If Tammy had decided to remain in California for college, her two choices were UCD and CSU Sacramento, of which Davis was her first choice.

Because I knew they are a good STEM school and that's why I applied to UC Davis. And I mean, my dad works at UC Davis hospital out there. So, I was really encouraged to apply, really encouraged to go. I actually was going to go if this school didn't work out. It was my second choice because of the proximity to my home, the rigor of the school, and because it is a good STEM school.....I mean, it was between UC Davis and Sac State. And I think UC Davis wins. Another thing was, the in-state tuition was good, but I did receive a scholarship to come here. I'm on full academic scholarship, so that was a really big decision on why I'm out here.

Regarding perceptions of UCD, one area that was striking to Tammy was how few people knew of UC Davis outside of California at the University that she decided to attend. She suggested that if the campus conducted broader outreach beyond California, more African American students would apply and possibly be admitted. Tammy shared that people at her university would ask her where else she applied as her second choice, and when she responded, none were familiar with UC Davis. This was shocking for Tammy, who described receiving the opposite response from her peers in California.

I want to say... for me, I've learned this recently, UC Davis was a two. It was a good school, a safe school to go to, but I come out here and they're like, "What's UC Davis?" I guess it's because I was so close to the campus. I think maybe that if you guys branch out more, you would have more African American students that applied, or maybe even accepted because people ask me out here, "Where did you apply to school? What was your second choice?" And I'll be like, "Oh, I was going to go to UC Davis." And they're like, "What's UC Davis?" And to me, I'm shocked because UC Davis is like, oh my goodness, people were asking me why I didn't go. "Why did you decline that school to go to an HBCU in the South?" And so I think for me it was a two, but if you ask anybody else on this campus, it might've been a four. I think that's something that UC Davis can work on.

When asked how she thought the campus could address this, Tammy suggested conducting better outreach to out-of-state students, particularly those in the South to reach more Black students.

On how? I think just better outreach. I mean, I doubt, and I don't know, but I doubt UC Davis is out in the South recruiting the students. The same way that those schools in the South weren't really in California recruiting me. So, it's harder for people to seek out what they don't know. I think it would be better if UC Davis went outside of the West, and maybe came down [to] the South and was like, "We have a school out here and we're working on getting more students that aren't from the West coast or aren't international." Because I know UC Davis has a lot of international students.

Major

Overall, I found that among the students I interviewed, those who were STEM majors or sought a career in STEM, such as becoming a medical doctor, conducted extensive research on their major. Most were also seeking more specifics related to their major in conjunction with their career goals. By

contrast, the students who had majors in humanities and social sciences evaluated their academics from a broader lens. They knew that UC Davis had strong academic programs and majors.

For example, Tammy, Nate, Kiesha, and Briana (all STEM focused) conducted fairly extensive research on their majors and assessed the opportunities available at UC Davis specific to their major, with their future career and educational goals in mind. Tammy's top reasons for choosing to apply to UC Davis and why it was her second choice were as follows: proximity to home, rigor of the school, and being a strong STEM school. She applied to UC Davis as a Psychology major and shared that as a pre-med major, the University that she decided to attend has a better track record of sending Black students to medical school. Tammy enrolled at an HBCU in the South, seeking a new experience and to be around more people that look like her. One of the top three aspects that appealed to Tammy in her decision to enroll at this HBCU was having a specific academic track in psychology/pre-med. Tammy believed this to be a unique aspect at this University and that this level of attention and specific training would not be available at another University, given her professional goals. Tammy noted that she did not speak with any faculty or staff at UCD about her major and career goals related to pre-med. Furthermore, she did not talk to or know any UCD students, although she did speak to some alumni.

In terms of academic offerings, Keisha found that for some majors UCD outlined a clear path that applicants could follow in terms of what courses they should take while in high school to prepare for their major, along with opportunities to satisfy certain college requirements through AP courses and exams. However, this was not available for other majors, and she suggested that sharing more information regarding the academic curriculum and what potential incoming first-year students can do to prepare in advance for their major would appeal to most students and increase their motivation to attend UC Davis.

I think just being more specific on what you're going to be taking for what you want to major in.

Because, I was lucky there's... It's very specifically laid out for where I'm going like, "Here are the

classes that are required. Here's what they're about." But for other majors, I've noticed some of my friends have had issues. They have no idea what they need to take really, and they're already in college, getting ready for classes and it's just not very clear. So that's clear, just as a prospective student, you can say, "Oh, I have to take this class. So I'll take this AP math class in high school, because that'll get me out of a couple of those classes." So, being able to plan and hope that you're going to go to that school and plan for that, gives a lot of the drive to work hard to try to get into that school, I think.

UCD was among her top choices as a Marine and Coastal Science major, and she would have liked to receive more information on what classes she could expect to be taking once enrolled, along with much more information on what AP classes or AP exams would have allowed her to obtain college credit coming into the University. In addition, she shared that it would have been helpful to receive more stories about UCD alumni who had graduated in her major along with "where they are now" professionally. Keisha used the UC Davis website extensively in her college choice process and found email to be a great source of information, but she wanted more visual representations of what is happening in the labs and classrooms at UC Davis. Keisha also used a variety of platforms that focused on the college process, in particular U.S. News and Niche, the latter of which she described as a platform for finding the best-ranked colleges based on what other people shared regarding their experiences, from which she could then determine what was important to her and then rank the colleges herself. As previously mentioned, she initially used Niche to learn about scholarships and this was later expanded to support her overall college search process.

Nate, an electrical engineering major, indicated that the primary driver of where he decided to enroll for college was the rankings of the engineering program at the respective universities that he was considering. Nate was highly proactive in his college search. Like Keisha, he performed much of his search for colleges/universities based on the rankings, including U.S. News.

Brianna applied to all the UCs that she could. She ranked those that she was most hopeful for being admitted to as UCB, UCLA, UCSD, and UCD. She applied to UCD because of its strength in her field of interest as a biology major who wanted to go to medical school. Most of the information that Brianna obtained was from the UCD website, where she primarily researched two areas: academics and student life, the latter of which I address in other section of my findings. Brianna conducted extensive research on the academic offerings at UCD, including details of the various majors available, professors who were well-known and their bios, along with research conducted at UCD related to her major and what certain labs were doing. During the application process, Brianna was motivated by the information on the UC Davis Biology major, and she also found the academic advising and resources available to Biology students highly appealing.

So yeah, like I said earlier, the biology research part definitely encouraged... I was more sure in my decision, because like I said, I was basically sure that I was going to apply to most UCs just because my parents pushed a closer school and so I just thought that I would go for all of them and see what happens. But after I had submitted my application, was in the process of doing so, I was more motivated by how much of UC Davis' efforts are put into the biology major, and the academic counseling for that major.

By contrast, Rico and Sean did not consider their academic major in such a career driven manner. In fact, Rico did not take a deep look at his major, although he did greatly value the opportunity to conduct undergraduate research. He was seeking the overall experience at an institution that would help him grow.

Oh, that was very important. I know for me personally going to college, it wasn't about pursuing this or accomplishing this or that. It was just to make myself a better person. And I feel like for me being able to research things that I love, like political science for me, that was going to be my

intended major. And I know to be able to research topics in that regard it would have been you know amazing.

Similarly, Sean looked at academics in general. He was focused on humanities and initially planned to apply as a history major. As such, he had a greater interest in the campus community, including student demographic numbers, the on-campus bowling alley at UCD, as well as the strong transportation and bicycle environment. When describing his view of the academic quality at UC Davis, Sean explained how he initially intended to major in history given his career interest in either teaching or law but changed his major to political science to appease his father's questions about what career he could get with a history degree. Sean made this adjustment knowing he had the option to change his major after enrolling. Given these options, Sean did not give a great deal of thought to his major and it was not a driving factor in his decision of where to enroll. He described this as follows:

I'm going to be honest, and this is not even a criticism, just genuinely. When I was filling out the application. So I guess [a] slight tangent, I'll try to keep it brief. I've thought about going into teaching. I've also thought about going into law. And so with regard to teaching history specifically, so I was like, okay, I'll get a history major. And when I was filling out the application with my dad, he was like, "Sean,¹¹ what are you going to do with the history major?" Thinking about how universal that major is. Right. And it was last minute anyway. So I was like, okay, I'll just change it, I'll put political science, that's pretty general, I can double major, I can switch it, that's not a super specialized thing. So that in itself was not something I was really looking into. And especially with regard to political science. I couldn't really tell you.

Academic stereotypes

While I spoke with these seven student scholars, a few stereotypes about the campus emerged that were related to academic rigor and scope – specifically that UC Davis is a STEM school, an

¹¹ Student's pseudonym

Agricultural or Ag school, and that it is laid back. The first was shared earlier from most of the STEM majors such as Keisha and Brianna who were drawn to the campus because of its reputation in STEM. This was not viewed as a negative, but for students who are interested in other disciplines it could make UC Davis less appealing. Another aspect that Keisha pointed out is how Davis is viewed by many as an Ag campus, which can also be a big draw for many students, while others see this as a limitation, thinking that the campus is best suited for students interested in Agriculture. This is a stereotype that can work against the campus in attracting more students with varied interests. Additionally, some students may not be aware of the broad diversity of academic offerings available within the area of Agriculture, which is interdisciplinary. Additionally, Keisha noted how many of her peers in the local area saw the school as laid back compared with their expectation of being immersed in a culture where students aggressively pursued their academics, citing double majoring as an example.

Oh, Davis is just looking like an agricultural school almost. And unfortunately where I'm from it's "Oh, you're going there because you want to stay close to home." That's the only reason. It's not because it's a good school, even though it was a great school. There's a lot of that... And there's some just some, saying it's looking almost like a laid back school, which is great, but also people want to just grind it out and double major, it's almost considered like it's not the best school for that, even if that's not true.

Nate was a good example of a local student who viewed UCD as a very strong Agriculture school and a great fit for students interested in this area, but not as competitive in engineering, his desired field, compared with the other universities that he was considering. Therefore, he rated UCD a 4 out of 5 for academics compared with UCB, which he rated a 1. Much of what Nate focused on was academic rankings tied to the major and his career goals. Overall, he viewed UC Davis is a Tier 1 school and a very strong campus, just not as competitive for his major.

So, Berkeley would be the one. So for my major, electrical engineering, I would maybe say the three or four range. Not that that school is actually bad because I know UC Davis is a top 20 engineering school which is a really high ranking. Not in terms of that's the worst, but in terms of where I wanted to go and where I wanted to be at, that would be more of a four. I didn't want to be the top 20. I wanted to be the top 10. But I think it just depends on major because one of my friends got into UC Davis for, I think, agricultural business and that's like his number one school because you guys are really good for that major. So I think in terms of academic rankings, I think things just depends on the major and what you want to do.

Keisha was very proud to be from the local region and had experienced and witnessed first-hand the impactful ways in which UCD is making a difference and contributing to the medical field. As someone who uses UC Davis Health, she felt that these contributions were not highlighted enough and there was more information that people should have about the campus, which could be shared with prospective students through social media, news stories, and even the campus' UC Davis News platform.

I think just how involved UC Davis is in so many other, just aspects of, what they do and what they contribute isn't highlighted enough and especially their medical program is a really good medical program and I'm through UC Davis health myself, and just how much they're doing, all the research should be highlighted even more, especially with more and more people wanting to go into the medical field.

Sean and Brianna both decided to attend UCLA, which was their first choice, yet UC Davis was also among their top choices. In fact, Sean viewed UCD in very high regard and rated the campus a 2 in comparison to UCLA, whereas Briana rated UCD a 2 or a 3. Briana was very excited to be accepted to UCD and receive her admit letter. She felt that UC Davis had a broad range of majors for everyone and found that biology majors across universities are well-resourced, which is why she applied in this area, although she was also interested in history like Sean.

But there's a really good range of majors on campus and there's something for everyone. My major is a pretty basic major, I guess, it's a really popular one and so I didn't do much research on anything else because I was sure that I was either a biology major or a prehistory major, but I think I ended up putting biology. But yeah, I feel like biology majors on a lot of campuses are often one of the most popular and so they have the most resources.

Finally, Zakiyah looked at UCD from two vantage points, namely major and overall academics. In terms of her major, Davis fared higher as she rated her HBCU a 3 out of 5 and UCD a 2 out of 5 because of the resources and campus environment. However, when looking at academics overall her rating was the exact opposite to Zakiyah, and she shared that she was attending the number one private HBCU and its reputation stood out higher than that of UCD.

Preparation for Future Careers

Two students specifically noted a desire to participate in internships. Rico expressed interest in participating in the UCD/DC program, a systemwide internship program in Washington, D.C. for UC undergraduates. This aligned with his desire to have new experiences, to spread his wings, and to go someplace further away from home. Nate was the only student I interviewed who specifically shared that undergraduate research was not a top priority for him given his plans to go directly into the workforce after graduating from college rather than pursuing an advanced degree.

It wasn't that important because I want to go straight into the workforce right in and I want to be some type of maybe project manager or start my own business, so research and getting a post-bachelor degree, wasn't really my focus.

Instead, he was seeking more information on internships and job placement, particularly how many people got jobs they wanted in STEM fields. He also wanted to know more about how African American students fared in the STEM programs at Davis, career fair opportunities, partnerships that UCD has with different companies, and details on how UCD would be the best place to attend if he wanted to work at

specific companies. Keisha too would have liked to receive more information on future internship opportunities, but – much like the other students I interviewed – desired additional information on research opportunities and future options to get into graduate school.

A few students viewed the academics at UC Davis from the vantage point of their future careers rather than their specific major. In fact, Rico focused on the opportunities and connections afforded by his Ivy League education. He found this to be highly appealing, along with the networks he had already begun establishing as an incoming student and how this could support his future. However, like most of the students I interviewed, Rico determined undergraduate research to be essential.

Oh that was very important. I know for me personally going to college, it wasn't about pursuing this or accomplishing this or that. It was just to make myself a better person. And I feel like for me being able to research things that I love, like political science for me, that was going to be my intend major. And I know to be able to research topics in that regard it would have been amazing.

Sean did value undergraduate research, but perhaps to a lesser degree than his peers who had specific goals of going to graduate or professional school. He viewed undergraduate research as a given at any university he was considering so it did not seem to factor into his overall decision of where to enroll. Nonetheless, he considered UC Davis to provide opportunities for students to pursue research.

I know that it's quite beneficial if you're thinking graduate school or law school that could be offering med school or any internships and stuff. So it seemed to be pretty special with Davis, having those kinds of opportunities. Then again, I hadn't visited a lot of campuses that didn't offer research opportunities. So I guess it was, not that I was thinking about it much, especially as a senior in high school who didn't know what the heck was going on. But I guess it was almost an expectation. That's a testament to how cool Davis is.

For students such as Zakiyah, Briana, and Tammy, who had specific goals to enroll in a graduate or professional school upon completing their undergraduate degree, the opportunity to conduct undergraduate research in their major weighed heavily in their view of the colleges/universities that they were considering. Briana's ultimate goal, like Tammy, was to go to medical school, and having research experiences in her major were a priority. She described this as follows:

Really important, just because I want to go pre-med, and so I want to end up at medical school, and I'm going to need to have experience doing research. So, I needed to make sure that whatever school I went to had opportunity to research in my major.

Zakiyah rated how important conducting research as an undergraduate was to her as an 8 out of 10, with 10 being the highest. This was primarily due to the fact that Zakiyah wanted to obtain an advanced degree, which is one of the aspects that made her HBCU so appealing as it has a dual-degree program, which would enable her to obtain two degrees in 5 years.

On a scale from one to 10, 10 being the highest, it'd be an eight. I plan on furthering my education after. HBCU1¹² offers a dual-degree program, which will offer you to take 3 years at HBCU1¹³ in your major which would be environmental science, and 2 additional years at a partnering institution to get an engineering degree. I would say that eight because I plan on becoming an environmental engineer.

As a pre-med student, Tammy felt very strongly about having research opportunities available. She believed that UC Davis could help her greatly with research opportunities but shared her certainty that the classes she would be taking at the University she is attending would meet the prerequisites of getting into medical school. She noted that these prerequisites appeared to be more deeply embedded into the undergraduate curriculum at her HBCU compared with that of UCD. Tammy also commented

¹² Pseudonym for the University at which Zakiyah enrolled.

¹³ Pseudonym for the University at which Zakiyah enrolled.

that she did not double check with UCD regarding this point and was sure that she could have talked to an advisor to obtain more information. Yet, when asked if she felt that UCD fully conveyed the breadth and depth of opportunities available to her, Tammy answered “not at all.” This interview took place in mid-August 2020, and Tammy said that it was not until 2 weeks earlier that she found out from her Dad that UCD has a program for African American students to get into medical school. She said that if the campus “advertised or put out what they have fully instead of here are our majors here are our minors apply,” then this would have been helpful as she did not really know what programs were offered.

Tammy shared that she knew UCD has good agriculture and good research but that was pretty much it. Given that she knew the campus was a good school, this level of information was fine for her, but people in the South and other places who are not as familiar with UCD would require more information. Tammy felt that part of not having this information was that she did not research more about the campus, especially in comparison to the ways she researched her current institution, but she also felt that UCD Davis did not show all of its cards. Rico did not state this explicitly, but it was an aspect that he and other students alluded to in terms of what information they found, even among those who believed they had enough information about and experience with the campus. As Tammy described, “maybe if I would’ve known more the decision would’ve been harder for me to make, but it wasn’t that hard.” In essence, not enough of the right information was presented to her. Rico was neutral as to whether the campus conveyed the breadth and depth of offerings to him, sharing that “I don’t have a negative or super positive outlook on that, but I know it is very good quality.” I looked more into the campus after realizing they had his major.

Discussion: Academic Reputation and Career Aspirations

An overarching theme was UCD not showing all of its cards. Even the students who felt well-versed in what the campus had to offer, indicated that there was more information that would have helped with their decision, even if stated more indirectly in their responses during our interview. It was

surprising to hear a student recommend that the campus conducts broader outreach out of state given some of the narrative around enrolling nonresident students. However, this speaks to a more national narrative of how much representation matters, and how the students I spoke with have a desire to see greater representation among the African diaspora in higher education. Perna (2006) points to student college choice based on a cost-benefit analysis aligned with four contextual layers, one of which is the social, economic and policy context (Perna, 2006, pg. 117). In this instance, we see how the participants in my study are astutely aware of and concerned with the social realities of the educational systems in our society that adversely impact Black student enrollment in higher education.

In the study of Contreras et al. (2015), students who did not get admitted to their first-choice school opted to attend a university outside of the UC system. The students who I interviewed all got into their first or second choice schools. For these students, it was not a question of getting in but rather a question of fitting in. Approximately half heavily weighed the academic offerings in their respective major, in conjunction with their career goals, as a key factor in their decision.

One of Tammy's comments regarding reaching out to more African American students outside of California suggested that many people may not be aware of the outreach conducted by the campus. While some contention exists politically in California about bringing in students from outside of the state, it was striking to hear a local student share how well-regarded UC Davis is in their eyes as well as her regional pride in ensuring that others know that the campus exists. Again, like Tammy, every student I spoke with had a genuine interest in seeing the campus increase its access and exposure to students who represent the African Diaspora, and that its reputation should not be limited to students from any specific region. I did find it interesting that Tammy shared her perspective that UCD has a large number of international students. We did not go further into this observation, but this perception was interesting. UCD has remained within the 18% capped enrollment for national/international students for some time.

Another phenomenon tied to academic reputation is college match. Hossler & Gallagher's college choice model identifies undermatching as being a challenge during the search phase in which students may unintentionally remove an institution from their choice set, or set of colleges to which they intend to apply and seek to learn more about, due to a lack of awareness along with not having accurate information about the institution (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). However, the students in my study did not undermatch in terms of the universities they were considering. Their perception of the level of academics, tied to the career opportunities available at each institution, was aligned with the high ranking and reputation of the institutions they were considering. All applied and enrolled at competitive institutions, whether aligned with a national ranking overall or based on the students' assessment regarding their specific major. Additionally, all of the students who identified as male in my study enrolled at the highest-ranked UC campuses or an Ivy League institution. The four students who identified as female also went to competitive institutions, and for two of them, they enrolled at the more competitive and well-known HBCUs. The other two enrolled at two highly ranked UC campuses. This speaks to how competitive they were as applicants and how competitive getting them to say yes to UC Davis would be.

Theme 3: Key Influencers

"As far as where I should specifically accept, that was mainly up to me, because I had gotten into good schools. Like I said, I talked to my mom and my dad about it." – Sean

In this section, I focus on a key theme in my interviews—participants' key influencers. This consists of the people who influenced students' college choice process, including those in their high school context, academic preparation and outreach programs, parents and family members, community members, and lastly friends and peers. While there are clear intersections among these key influencers, there were some critical takeaways about the roles and spaces of influence for students' decision-making process. I begin with the high school context.

High School Context

Teachers. Several students had a favorite teacher who played a pivotal role in their support network. Having this type of engagement with their teachers allowed the students I interviewed to have more interactions and build a strong rapport as well as a sense of trust. I found that at least one teacher also served as the student's college advisor and wore multiple hats to support students at their school. For example, Keisha's English teacher was also her homeroom teacher and taught her college-prep class. The same teacher referred Keisha to some of her former students who were currently enrolled in college and graduated from their high school. This allowed Keisha to learn from them and glean more information. Keisha described this as follows:

They gave me contact information for a lot of different students that they had had, that went to UC Davis, UC Berkeley, Santa Cruz. So, I was able to email them personally with my questions, which was really helpful, and they helped direct me to websites, and just gave me a direction about what I should be looking for. Because you can look on the website, but if you don't know what's most important to you, it's much more difficult. So, she really helped me prioritize what was important to me and what didn't matter as much when I was choosing a school.

Briana also had support from two of her favorite teachers, who helped her think through the decision-making process of where to enroll rather than telling Briana where to go. Briana was proactive in reaching out to her teachers by email when she had questions, and they always responded.

I had emailed them and I was like, I'm struggling with this decision. And... they didn't blatantly say, go to UCLA, but they were like, 'You know, earlier in the year you said that you really wanted to go to UCLA, so I don't understand what the struggle of this decision is.'

Similarly, Sean's History teacher Mr. Nunes was a big supporter who gave him tips and served as a mentor. Sean also shared with his teacher the schools he was considering, including UCD. Another

connection with Mr. Nunes¹⁴ is Sean's interest in the humanities field with a desire to major in history and a possible career in teaching.

My history teacher Mr. Nunes, shout out to a real one. No, that individual is someone who's a mentor in and out of the classroom. I can bring him my problems and he'll listen, but not necessarily as an adult rather a colleague. I've known him for and had classes with him for all 4 years, and he was someone that's like, 'Hey man, I see something in you, go after whatever it is you need, I'm here for any help, you should want.'

Mr. Nunes also recommended that Sean purchase some school merchandise when he went on college tours, telling Sean to "just wear it and see how you feel, the pride that it invokes and that sort of thing." All of these teachers were very encouraging and sought to help students with their own process rather than imposing any preference on where they thought the student should enroll. Beyond encouragement, they were also a source of college information for these students in their decision-making process.

Counselors. Among the students who noted a counselor providing support, in most instances they were specifically the College Counselor or College and Career Counselor. For Briana, her college counselor was a great supporter and resource throughout her college choice process. Due to COVID-19, her counselor held Zoom calls once they could no longer visit the high school campus in-person. Her counselor also provided support by editing her college essays. The college counselor supported Briana through 10th–12th grade and, based on Briana's description, it sounded as though her counselor more broadly supported the juniors and seniors at her high school, although they had their first meeting during Briana's sophomore years. This allowed her counselor to get to know Briana over a 3-year period.

I was talking to her [my counselor] throughout the whole process, and I was doing Zoom calls with her when we weren't allowed on campus anymore. She edited essays for me, she was

¹⁴ Pseudonym for Sean's history teacher.

realistic with me and what I could accomplish, but also helped me with a lot of my goals. She gave me access to scholarships that I hadn't heard of, and things like that. And then when I was deciding, after every decision I would email her. And then when I was deciding between my top three, I called her too. So, my top three were UCLA, UC Berkeley, and Johns Hopkins. And I called her, and we basically went through the pros and the cons for each one. And she knew that UCLA was the school that I wanted to go to, so she basically was even saying, 'You wanted to go to UCLA, so I think you should go to UCLA.' But she made me list out why I should go to each one, and basically realize that I had a lot more pros for UCLA than the other two schools.

Sean's college counselor provided what he viewed as general information. Rather than providing specifics for a particular campus, they had students perform exercises to research the information that would allow them to make an informed decision. The counselor integrated this within their curriculum by giving students assignments to research various schools and help them better understand the college process. She also tried to get representatives to come visit, although Sean noted that as a small school in a more remote area, he understood that not many college representatives were able to visit, including UC Davis. The type of support from the college counselor described by Sean was similar for most of the students I spoke with who made any mention of working with their school counselor(s). For Rico, the most influential person at his school in terms of support through the college process was Mr. Wiseman,¹⁵ the College Counselor at his Sacramento high school. This was very similar to the role that Sean and Briana's teachers served. During the 3 years that he attended high school in Sacramento, Mr. Wiseman was always there whenever Rico had a question. The support was not focused on where Rico should enroll, but rather it was geared more toward supporting Rico in pursuing his goals. Rico described Mr. Wiseman's role as follows:

¹⁵ A pseudonym for the counselor.

He was always there to let me know whenever I had to meet a certain requirement for a SAT score, or how to get better in terms of testing and all that, and how to keep my grades up. But he was not influential in terms of deciding a school for me to go to. He was just supportive in me doing what I want to, and that's pursuing self and betterment for me. And I just wanted to go, like I said, to a place that would just make me a better person. And at the end of the day, it didn't come down to what a certain school did or didn't have, it was just financial aid, and the family aspect like I said before.

Nate also had the support of a College and Career Readiness Counselor, whom Nate referenced by first and last name rather than beginning with a prefix, which gave me the impression that his counselor established a level of comfort and familiarity with his students. The type of support provided by his counselor included a great deal of information on scholarships.

[H]e creates podcasts for us, all different types of schools, things like that, where people interview recruiters and things like that, just so we really can ask people, literally working at the school, all the different types of questions, as far as campus climate, majors, research and also financial aid, things like that. And also, just acceptances... I think that's a really good resource that he has.... And then in addition, he does a lot of help with essays also picking the right school, as far as major goes and things like that.

However, Nate stressed that as a student he was slightly different because he knew what he wanted to do and where he wanted to go; therefore, much of his decision in terms of where to enroll came from his own research.

Unlike the other students I spoke with who received at least some general support from their college counselors, Tammy was the only student to explicitly state that she did not receive much support from her school counselors or her school in general. This was even more the case when COVID hit because Tammy lost connection with her teachers. Prior to this, Tammy did remember someone

from UCD visiting her school once or twice and described how it was also challenging because the visits took place during school hours; she stated that “it’s hard when you’re trying to maintain your grades, to go to school, and miss class to go to a UC Davis thing.” Due to the lack of support from her school, Tammy felt it necessary to look outside of her high school and hired a paid college counselor who helped her with the college search process until it was time to decide between her top two choices, at which point it was a family decision between Tammy and her parents.

Mainly my parents. I didn’t really seek outside help besides my college counselor that I had.

Once it came down to UC Davis or HBCU2,¹⁶ it was just me and my parents talking, especially when COVID hit, we lost schools. So I lost connection to those, and it was just a personal family decision.

Additionally, in reflecting on others from whom she received information and encouragement, Tammy said “it’s sad but a security guard at my school said you should go to an HBCU; they’re giving out scholarships and they’re giving out admission.”

College Center. College and Career Centers at high schools often facilitate high school visits from various university representatives, allowing them to meet with and present to prospective students. For the students I interviewed, this space served as a source of information on the overall application process. Zakiyah, for example, noted that a UCD representative probably visited her high school but she did not explicitly remember given the numerous university visits coordinated through her school’s College Center.

I believe someone visited my school from UC Davis, but I would have not paid attention. My college [counselor] had a lot of rotating college visit it... She had at least four colleges a week coming to our campus to visit it, so I got lost in all of them at one point. There may or may not have been a visit, but there were so many colleges coming, I wouldn’t remember.

¹⁶ Pseudonym for the HBCU at which Tammy decided to enroll.

While Zakiyah observed that the College Center was a good support for most students at her school, she did not find this resource as helpful as the information provided by family and friends. The Center did pass on general information that Zakiyah felt was available to students at her school, but they had to be somewhat proactive to access it.

My school usually provided the basic information that college campuses would send. If they sent it, they provided the information. They would provide demographics, housing. If colleges sent student voices or student opinions or student life things, they would provide that to us.

Whatever was sent was showcased, provided to the students, or available for access if you decided to access it.

Keisha was able to obtain much information from her high school on researching colleges. She described her school support as follows:

[My] school had classes or projects that were looking at colleges, and they would have speakers who had gone to my [high] school, who went to all these colleges, come in and talk. And you have to take a class to get those resources, but it was incredibly helpful to see people who went to the same high school as me and went to these colleges, and where they are now.

While Keisha did not expressly indicate that college/university presentations were coordinated by the College & Career Center, most school visits are coordinated through that office, and I got the impression that this was also the case at her high school. Beyond a specific College Center, it was a unique internship opportunity through his school that increased Sean's exposure to leadership at various levels and served as a means of empowerment for pursuing his college and career goals. Sean was influenced by his experience as an intern with the local school district. He shared the following:

I had an internship as my student board representative for the school district's board of trustees. And so, the trustees there all had strong academic backgrounds and figured that I would do pretty well for myself after high school, so that helped.

Outside of any particular person, Nate's school publicly celebrated a historical moment as he became the first student in the entire school district to be admitted to a particular Ivy League institution. Nate linked this experience to how UC Davis could consider celebrating students even more.

Well, one thing I could add that could be as a role in a sense, as far as maybe my school's friends... is, when I got early admission into Ivy2,¹⁷ the school kind of went insane because I was the first kid in the district. They had a whole thing, my name on the bulletin, they called my name in the announcements, they did a lot of stuff around that. So, I feel like that just made me feel like, 'Oh, maybe I should be going to Ivy2.'¹⁸ So, I would think for students, maybe more appreciation as far as... getting into Davis and how big of a feat that is, can really make them feel like they really want to go to the school.

Coaches. A few students noted having some connections with their sports coaches who encouraged them in their college choice process. For Sean it was his basketball coach, though he did not provide much more information on the role that his basketball coach played. Rico had the most to say in this instance:

Talking to sports coaches was helpful, because they can tell me a little bit about where they went. And it's good to get just experiences that aren't completely academic. They invoke extracurriculars like sports as well, because that is an important part of college that isn't talked about much and that was definitely helpful.

Keisha too noted that talking to her sports coaches, both at her school and in the community, was helpful.

¹⁷ Pseudonym for the Ivy League institution that Nate was admitted to.

¹⁸ Pseudonym for the Ivy League institution that Nate was admitted to.

Academic Preparation and Outreach Programs

Programs exist that establish explicit partnerships with schools and universities to support students in their preparation for higher education. Not all students I interviewed participated in such outreach programs. Briana shared that because her school is a college preparatory school, college counseling support was embedded in her program, and therefore, the school did not need to participate in any outreach programs. These programs are often focused on students who are either historically underrepresented minorities, first-gen, and/or low-income. This could have been another reason why these programs were not on Briana's radar. A couple of students, however, noted being part of these programs and the influence they had on them. Specifically, Nate and Rico—both male students from the local region—described several academic preparation programs of influence: the SMASH academy,¹⁹ the EAOP,²⁰ College Track,²¹ and SAYS.²²

For Nate, the SMASH program was highly influential as it offered an opportunity for him to tour UC Davis occasionally, and provided him with great exposure to current students, facilities, and more direct campus engagement in the disciplinary areas he was most interested in. Nate also participated in SAYS, which hosts an annual youth summit on the UC Davis campus and connects all participants with the campus community. Nate described it as follows:

They showed us like, "Oh, this is the financial aid office. There's a lot of scholarships available."

We've spoken to students at the school, and we've done interviews for them and different projects they've done in the school that they really enjoyed. And then I also did this SAYS summit college day. So just being on the campus and experiencing that as well.

¹⁹ <https://www.smash.org/>

²⁰ <https://eaop.ucdavis.edu/>

²¹ <https://collegetrack.org/>

²² <https://www.says.ucdavis.edu/>

Another benefit of Nate's participation in the SMASH program was the ability to speak with many UC Davis students in the engineering department, including some of their Residential Advisors (RAs) for the summer residential program who studied engineering at UCD. Through this network of current students, Nate was able to learn about "some of their classes and how they're enjoying it, just the class atmosphere and things like that," and he was also able to connect with campus leadership.

Additionally, although Nate did not participate in the EAOP, he did benefit from the services that it provided to his high school. Nate described attending a large college event hosted at his high school that allowed him to hear from key UC and UCD administrators, including the then UC President Napolitano, UCD Chancellor Gary May, and myself as Executive Director of Undergraduate Admissions.²³ In fact, this was the only visit that Nate remembers from UC/UCD to his high school, which Nate described as follows:

I think you, Chancellor Gary May, and President Janet Napolitano visited our school for interview and assembly. Yeah, I'm pretty sure that's the only one [school visit] that I remember. I think you guys may have done a podcast with the college and career readiness program, [at] my school, but I don't really remember that. So, I only remember Janet Napolitano and Chancellor Gary May and yourself going to the school.

Rico did participate in EAOP as well as College Track during the time that he attended high school in Sacramento, through which he received much information about UCD. Rico talked to many of the directors in both programs about the UCD community and said that the experience was amazing. The program directors gave him a large amount of information regarding campus diversity, which was something that really attracted Rico to UC Davis.

²³ Based on Nate's description, I was able to determine that this event is known as Achieve UC and was coordinated by EAOP.

Yes, so I'm in College Track at the Sacramento site and we do have some alumni that went to UC Davis. And I also, I mean I am in EAOP, and I had a ton of resources there that would be able to give me information on whatever I might need regarding the community and stuff like that. And I also talked to a lot of the directors at both EAOP and College Track about UC Davis, and it was just about regarding the community it was amazing.

Lastly, Nate felt strongly that the University should offer more outreach opportunities by putting students on campus so they get a feel that college is for them, and that a particular college/university could be a good fit, especially underrepresented students and especially before they apply, which was something that Nate felt was extremely helpful. He also noted how the SAYS College Day does this very well. His recommendation is for UC Davis to provide intentional campus visits and partner with outreach programs such as SAYS.

I think outreach for students, I think is really good. Just putting the kids on the campus, am I getting a feel for them, showing colleges for them? Just the underrepresented communities and especially before they apply, just so they can do it. Stuff like SAYS, Sacramento Area Youth Speaks, does that really well with the college day and it's bringing an atmosphere where they feel involved in the campus. I just feel like that's a really big thing for getting kids to apply.

UCD did this well with SAYS and Nate felt that more of this could and should be done to reach more students of color and ensure they have a sense of belonging, feel welcomed, and can see themselves at UCD.

Outside of these programs that support college access and preparation and partner with high schools, Tammy was involved in a few programs that provided broad support as she prepared for college. This included Jack & Jill of America,²⁴ which she was involved with for a brief period during high

²⁴ Jack & Jill of America, Inc. is a national organization established in 1938 with over 240 chapters nationwide that provides African American youth between the ages of 2 and 19 with social, cultural, and educational opportunities. Source: <https://www.jackandjillinc.org/>

school. There were also several freshman outreach programs at her school, including a Public Service Academy that she participated in, a program that worked with students who wanted to become health professionals. Tammy did not go into detail about these programs, and while they did not appear to be as prevalent in her college choice process as the programs that Rico and Nate described, it was clear that they did shape her overall high school experience.

Campus Contacts and Affiliates

When exploring how students connected to UC Davis, in addition to outreach/academic preparation programs at their high schools, the other main contacts can be categorized into the following areas: (1) current students and alumni, and (2) staff, faculty and administrators.

Current Students and Alumni. In terms of speaking with current students, Sean went on a campus tour and discussed specifically connecting with tour guides. Brianna was the only student who noted getting a call from a current UC Davis student, which she felt was helpful. Rico mentioned talking to students through the visits about football. In terms of UCD representatives, the people who appeared to stand out the most to him were faculty coaches and outreach program directors. Tammy shared the following:

Let me think. I don't think I know anyone that goes to UC Davis. I've talked to alumni, as I said before, which it's been a long time since they've been there, but I knew that it would be a good school, regardless. If COVID had really, I mean, it is broke out over here, but if it wasn't taken care of, I would be on the UC Davis campus right now.

As previously mentioned, Nate talked to many current students through SMASH, one of the outreach programs that he was involved. While Rico did not say this, I imagine he had a similar experience given that the programming for EAOP, for example, relies heavily on student advisors along with the regional directors. Others connected with current students through their campus visit. For example, Briana received a call from a UC Davis student, and while UCLA remained her number one choice, she still

found it helpful to have this opportunity. Briana described how speaking with a current UCD student before making her final decision allowed her to ask questions and observe the natural reactions of a student regarding UCD as well as their direct experience instead of relying on the campus website, which she considered to contain information pushed by the University and not be natural. She felt that it would have been difficult to obtain real experiences and information otherwise.

Sean, Rico, Nate, Keisha, and Briana all had some type of direct interaction with a UCD student, whether through a campus visit, outreach program, phone call, or other connection. Tammy and Zakiyah were the only two students who did not note speaking with a student; Tammy specifically did not recall speaking with any UCD students. When considering the information that she found online about UCD and other schools, including the HBCU she attends, Zakiyah shared that she actually received much information from family friends who attended that HBCU. Therefore, the alumni perspective and community connection were a crucial network that that she was able to tap into, and the people would refer her to others.

Tammy also attended a high school at which many teachers were UCD alumni, so she received a great deal of encouragement to go to UCD, and they also provided her with information about the campus. Furthermore, she attended many athletics games on campus. When describing UCD, Tammy shared the following: “I’ve embraced the culture, I love the campus, it just wasn’t a good fit for me,” although she really liked the college town, the people seemed nice, and being from the local area she was familiar with the campus.

Yeah. At school, a lot of teachers have gone to UC Davis, and it’s just a big push because I’m so close to this campus. I’ve gone to UC Davis basketball games, gymnastics meets. I’ve embraced the culture. I love the campus. It just wasn’t a good fit for me.

Tammy had a high-level understanding of UC Davis but did not have many details about the campus as we continued to talk more.

Staff, Faculty, and Administrators. As previously indicated, Nate and Rico connected with UCD staff, faculty, and/or administrators. The key points of contact at UCD for Rico were the football coaches, the faculty, the EAOP, and College Track. Rico went on a few unofficial visits to UC Davis and connected with a faculty member whom he referenced quite frequently during the interview. Rico described him as being the person who helps athletes when they are done and graduate from UCD and provides career support. Rico shared that he had an amazing experience during the time that he was being recruited by the campus; this person made Rico feel completely welcome and he felt confident that he would have been supported at UC Davis. Akin to Rico's feedback, Keisha also shared that talking to coaches was helpful, although for her these were sports coaches at her school and in the community as she was not a recruited athlete. Rico connected with coaches at the universities as well as a mentor who was a professional athlete from the local region.

Talking to sports coaches was helpful, because they can tell me a little bit about where they went. And it's good to get just experiences that aren't completely academic. They invoke extracurriculars like sports as well, because that is an important part of college that isn't talked about much and that was definitely helpful.

Nate connected with Associate Vice Chancellor (AVC) of Enrollment Management and his mother who was a UCD employee.

And then I've talked to people like removed to maintain confidentiality and anonymity... just the resource at the school, just the pros and cons of the school, but I just still think the biggest thing for me was probably the ranking. I don't think any person gauged me; I think I gauged myself by doing my own research.

Here, Walter Robinson should be mentioned as this was the AVC of Enrollment Management Nate referenced. Robinson first joined UC Davis as Executive Director of Undergraduate Admissions in 2011 and was later named UC Davis' AVC for Enrollment Management in 2015, a position he held until his

retirement in 2018 after a nearly 40-year career in admissions and enrollment. Under his leadership, a significant number of strategic diversity initiatives were successfully launched at UCD to increase the enrollment of students from historically underrepresented and marginalized communities. These initiatives included key efforts to increase the enrollment of African American undergraduates and to develop a partnership with the Umoja Community Education foundation, resulting in the campus reaching 4% African American enrollment in fall 2018. He was also instrumental in establishing the UC Davis SMASH program, which Nate participated in, and also established the first Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between UC Davis and the Umoja Community, resulting in the campus hosting the Umoja Community's annual symposium in Northern CA for a series of years. This drew "up to 200 African Diaspora students to the campus for a day of culturally relevant leadership development and admissions workshops...[and] UC Office of the President... establishing a systemwide partnership with Umoja to support students' success and transfer opportunities" (Jones, 2019).

Tammy did not speak with anyone from any of the departments at UC Davis that had a major that she was interested in or talk to anybody about going to med school from the campus, such as a faculty member or staff. Rico's experience between his campus visit and connecting with a faculty member was a critical aspect of why he felt so engaged with UC Davis and had strongly considered the campus. I observed that Rico did not describe this person as faculty, but genuinely viewed them as a person whom he could contact to obtain the information he required about the campus and who made him feel very welcome.

Interestingly, all of the Black male students had this direct interaction with staff, whereas only one out of the four Black female students did. This student was Keisha, who had campus engagement through the BSU and as a result would have been able to connect with students. She valued that experience and the interactions with the UCD employees she came into contact with. Sean connected with a UC Davis representative along with an alumnus who attended the college fair, likely tabling with

the UC Davis representative based on Sean's description of the interaction. Given that his high school was small and in a remote location, Sean and his mom had to travel out of his local area to attend this fair, which was held at a larger school in a larger town. However, it was this direct interaction with the UCD representative at the college fair that became the selling point to really introduce Sean and his mom to UC Davis and make a positive connection. Sean's tip for UCD, or more of an observation, was that school presentations can be boring, so students zone out; thus, colleges need well-prepared dynamic speakers.

So, like I had mentioned, just in general, the presentations at schools, it's easy to zone out during them. But if you have charismatic people who are well-spoken prepared and all that, that can be pretty effective. That was how my mom and I were introduced at the college fair, at a bigger high school, in a bigger town.

Again, Sean did not have someone visit his school but said that he did not attribute this to UCD, but rather to his school being small, remote, and fairly new having been around for only 7 years, which resulted in few college representative visits.

Parents and Family

In all instances, the students' parents were highly supportive. Some parents had their own preferences in terms of where they wanted their children to enroll, and although they may have outwardly expressed this, the overall sentiment was that their parents and family supported each student in attending whatever institution was going to make them happy and be the best fit. For example, Zakiyah's parents, who both attended UCD (although they completed their degrees elsewhere), were big proponents of her joining the Aggie family. This direct connection along with the close proximity of their family members to campus made applying to UC Davis a given. However, Zakiyah "applied to UC Davis as a safety school," meaning that it was the back-up plan if her true goal did not work out. As previously noted, Zakiyah reported that she did not use the resources from the College and

Career Center as much as other seniors at her school did. Rather, she determined that the most helpful resources for deciding where she would go to college were her “family and family friends who are teachers, and not necessarily the school.” Her parents and family were actively involved in her college choice process. Along with family friends, they were her most helpful resources and supporters. She described the kind of input she received from her family as follows

It was very informative, talking with family members, to family friends, but very encouraging, very involved group of people. I know compared to some other people, their parents weren’t really involved in what they did for college applications or anything, but my family was.

Briana’s parents did influence and encourage her to attend a college closer to home and genuinely wanted her to attend UC Berkeley, which is why she decided to apply to all nine UC campuses. However, they were also supportive of her attending the school that she desired, and thus, she considered them to be supportive overall.

According to Nate, his parents’ education level influenced him at all stages of the college choice process: “both my parents went to college and it was ingrained in me, ‘Make school my hustle,’ as my mom always says. And I always felt like college can open so many doors for me, so that’s why I did it.” His father obtained his PhD in a different engineering area at UCD and helped Nate to make his decision related to sorting through various engineering programs. Nate described his father’s engagement as follows:

[He] weighed in with just what he felt was the best schools for engineering, things like that, and what he feels can give you the best resources. So, he helped me just because he’s been in the STEM major and he’s been at Davis, so he helped me make my decision. But besides that, my family had input and said, ‘Oh, but you should go to this school because this is a top high school for your major,’ but at the end of the day, it was my decision and they’re fully supportive of it. So whatever decision I was going to make, they were going to go behind it full force.

Most of the other students whose parents had at least a 4-year degree shared that the value of a college degree was instilled in them from a very young age. As Sean described, “the main thing is just my parents for the longest time, have pushed the importance of education and how many doors that opens up, especially as a minority.” His mother also played a key role and pushed for him to attend UCB. Even during our interview, it was evident that he had a strong circle of family; his mom popped in and out of the interview and was so pleasant and excited for the discussion.

Sean’s family arrangement was such that he lived with his mom, and therefore, she was fairly active throughout his entire college choice process from start to finish. By contrast, Sean’s dad lived across the country and he talks to him every so often. His father’s input in terms of where to attend college was less readily available. Sean had to be slightly more proactive, but his dad was available if Sean had any questions. His dad appeared to be more hands-off at the final stage of the college choice process. His dad also reminded Sean that if things did not work out with college, there was always the military. Sean’s dad provided a significant amount of support through his military benefits, which enable Sean to attend school practically wherever he desired. On the front end of the college choice process during the application process, Sean’s dad played a more active role since Sean happened to be staying with him over the Thanksgiving holiday while he was preparing to submit the UC application.

He is more so, if you have questions, feel free to ask me kind of person. I actually was submitting the applications while at his house because it was for Thanksgiving break. And so, at that point it was, how do I help my son become a strong applicant rather than let me talk to him about where he should or shouldn’t go. He’s always mentioned the military if school doesn’t work out. And then with his history in the military, the benefits that I get from that, have really given me a why not, to going to college, especially a good 4-year in California. But it to be fair, it was never a question of whether or not I was going to go to 4-year. My parents had got like, no, this is the way.

Keisha's parents were also supportive and encouraged her to go where she would be happiest and where she thought she was going to succeed. Keisha's family was active in researching information and began taking her on college tours when she was in the fourth or fifth grade. She shared the following:

It's always been that pressure of, 'I'm going to college,' but I do get a lot of freedom in where I want to go. So, I was able to choose a lot of places that I was interested in, where I wanted to go. My parents were really helpful in taking me on college tours and helping me get the information I need and pushing me to reach out to people that can help me. But there was never really a huge push of going anywhere other than just go where you're going to be the happiest and where you think you're going to succeed.

Tammy's family was supportive and advocated for her to attend UC Davis as they thought it would be a safe bet. Her Dad was a strong proponent of the campus and encouraged Tammy to enroll because he felt that not everyone gets admitted and saw this as a once in a lifetime opportunity. There was also the benefit of the campus being close to home, allowing Tammy to stay home while in school and if taking online courses due to COVID-19. However, Tammy felt that she could go to UCD later for a different purpose other than undergraduate studies, such as completing her medical residency.

Rico shared that he received much support from both sides of his family, and that they all just wanted him to be happy. In terms of the Ivy League he selected, although it was out of state, Rico said "they were extremely ecstatic, but they definitely weren't the people to say like, 'Oh, you're going too far. That's too close.' It was definitely a lot more surrounded in where I felt happiest." Nate also mentioned how his mom as well as an administrator at UC Davis went through the pros and cons of the campus. In the end, Nate felt that the ranking of the engineering programs at the institution he was considering was the largest factor in his decision along with the research he conducted into each program and campus. In all instances, the students I interviewed shared that the final decision was

theirs to make. They all spoke with their parents and/or family who weighed in but left to ultimate choice to the student.

Community

Church folks. While Zakiyah was the only person to specifically identify church as a primary resource, historically, the Black church has played a pivotal role in civic and educational engagement within the diaspora. In their study titled “The Church, the Family, and the School in the African American Community,” Billingsley and Caldwell (1991) found that community outreach is an integral part of the Black church. Among a sample of 315 Black Churches in the northeast, they found that 216 of those churches sponsored some type of outreach program, with close to 70% operating at least one outreach program, close to 60% operating two or more programs, and nearly half operating three or more. In total, these churches sponsored 900 programs of which one-third had a primary focus aimed at children and youth. Additionally, of the total number of programs offered by the 216 churches, 11% were defined as formal education and assistance programs. These programs ranged in scope from offering after-school or academic support programs and Head-Start to having their own secondary schools, and also to offering college support and college preparatory programs. Among the churches that did not offer formal programming, several did provide scholarships to support students in attending college (Billingsley & Caldwell, 1991, p. 434). This was part of a national study that investigated Black churches throughout the U.S. and the ways in which the church serves to support and engage youth, foster social networks, and help facilitate educational access.

For Zakiyah, a large portion of her support came from her church family, whom she described as friends of the family who have known her for years. This faith-based space provided a critical community of people, including her Youth Pastor, who served to connect Zakiyah to a broader social network. As we talked, I learned that there was an intersection between the many family friends that provided support, people from church who were alumni or facilitated introductions between Zakiyah and other alumni, as

well as current students at the institution where she ultimately enrolled. This social capital network was more informative than the resources she accessed online from various university websites and even from her high school. The church community provided Zakiyah with direct alumni perspectives and referrals for additional people that Zakiyah could speak with. In her own words, Zakiyah's network consisted of

[f]amily friends, current students. People from church who, when I said I had an interest, were like, 'Oh, let me connect you to this person and this person and this person.' More of a network type thing, through different groups of people.

Second to this network, the most helpful information came from the campus visit to her future university, which occurred in late fall immediately before the deadline to apply for their early action program. The campus visit was extremely helpful for Zakiyah because the institution was "really adamant on giving all the information you can for new students applying during those tours." In addition, she was provided with much information about the campus, with the greatest body of knowledge coming from its students.

Family Friends. Like Zakiyah, Sean shared how his mom's friend, a professor at the University of Southern California (USC), was available to speak with him and was familiar with some of the schools that he was considering. I did not get the impression that this person played a critical role in Sean's decision-making, but they did serve as part of a larger network that Sean could tap into. Sean described how the information he received from the family friend served to affirm what Sean was already thinking. This reinforcement functioned as confirmation that Sean was on the right track.

Mentors. Aside from Sean, who referred to his history teacher as a mentor, Rico was the only student who explicitly named having a mentor and spent time describing their role in his life and college choice process. Rico's mentor, a professional athlete who attended high school in the local region, was a

tremendous help. Rico had known his mentor for a while and recalled that person sharing reflections of his own higher education journey.

[I]f he had the chance to go back and really value his education and take advantage of what he had at University Y,²⁵ he would have definitely done that.

This resonated directly with Rico who interpreted this advice to mean, “definitely value your academics, because it’s important.” Rico took this advice to heart and noted how he then “just molded it in my own way of really wanting to pursue academics, and I want to use academics to make me a better person. And I also want to play football.” For Rico, being a scholar and an athlete were not mutually exclusive, and through his responses it was clear that he was just as passionate about his academics as he was about the sport he loves to play.

Workplace. Only one student, Sean, mentioned working while going to school, through which he was introduced to many employees who were college or high school students and were planning to attend a 4-year college. While these coworkers did not directly influence the colleges that Sean applied to nor his decision of where to enroll, being in an environment where he was surrounded by current college students and graduates was a source of inspiration. In fact, Sean explained how his manager was a UCLA alumnus and seemed to be doing well for himself, which left an impression on Sean, who described himself as having big goals and jokingly described the odds being stacked against UC Davis.

At my workplace, a lot of the employees there often, if they’re not already in college, they’re high schoolers that are planning to attend 4 years. So, there’s that, not an expectation, but just, these people have something going for them. So, it’s probably wise that you follow suit, not that that they were the reason. But it was just a supporting feeling of like, I’m doing something right. My head manager....started his career [at their restaurant] at UCLA. And so, I had mentioned

²⁵ Pseudonym for the University that Rico’s mentor attended.

that to him, and I was like, not that I see myself in him, but I was like, he's doing very well for himself.

In addition to this place of employment, Sean worked at another restaurant and generally found that various people gave him suggestions on where to apply for college.

The decisions to apply came from any and everybody... I was working at a pizzeria, and I get people there [who would] be like, you should go over here and there and all that sort of thing. Yet when it came down to where he should ultimately attend, this decision was Sean's to make, as was the case for the other students I interviewed.

Friends and Peers. Common among all of the interviewees was that their decision of where to enroll was theirs to make. In most cases, for those who did engage their peers in the college choice process, their friends served as a good support network. Their friends were there to help the students come to their own conclusion or simply served to encourage. A couple of students did not have many – if any – discussions with their friends when it came to where they wanted to go to college. Tammy's friends did not play a role in where she decided to attend. In fact, this was a topic that Tammy kept private from her peers and viewed as personal. She described not wanting to deal with potential judgment and ridicule from people who did not have a positive view of attending an HBCU; therefore, she kept this aspect of her college choice process within her family circle.

I wanted to make my own decision and I didn't like outside pressures because I knew people would be like, 'You worked so hard to go to an HBCU.' And I didn't like that response because it's not just an HBCU. And I know UC Davis is great in all... that it does, but this was just something different that I wanted to try out.

Neither Zakiyah's friends nor Nate's played a role in their decision. Zakiyah's best friend applied to the same HBCU but ended up attending another University in the South. Either way, Zakiyah made it clear that this did not and would not have affected her decision regardless. Briana's friends were also highly

supportive and a critical network that Briana turned to when it was time to decide where to enroll. In late April, the May 1 national deadline to accept her admissions offer was quickly approaching, and Briana had still not determined where to attend college; therefore, she enlisted the support of her close friends, who helped her through the process of reaching her own decision. Similar to her college counselor, Briana's friends took her through a list of pros and cons. I got the impression that this external support from people she respected and whose opinions she valued was critical. Briana described this as follows:

My closest friends, when I was struggling with the decision between those top three, had basically helped come up with a pros and cons list for me, helped me decide too, I guess. I asked them, it was, I think, late June, like the 28th or something... or no, sorry, late April, like the 28th of April, super late April, and I was freaking out. And I texted a lot of them and asked them which school I should go to, and they basically just took the same pros and cons thing.

The only other student who noted seeking advice from friends was Sean, and this was at the point of application. Three of Sean's friends also got admitted to UCLA, one of whom he was planning to dorm with but that did not happen. While Sean was close with all of his friends, UCLA was already a goal whether he talked about it or not. By the time they were ready to talk about where they were going to go to college, Sean had already made up his mind. If his friends went to UCLA, then that would have been a bonus; however, he emphasized that it would not have influenced his decision.

I looked to them if I had questions on the UC application, if there's any things that they would recommend that I do in general about the school year. They might check out a club and then like, that would look good on my little resume as a high school senior for applications. But no, for the most part, I was stuck in my individuality.

Rico's response seemed to capture the overall sentiment when it came to the involvement of friends. In fact, he gave a big chuckle when asked what role his friends played in making his decision. He described

himself as having a lot of friends and they are all different. While they did not play a significant role in his decision, one of his closest friends said “just go where you feel like you want to go; follow your heart,” and that is exactly what Rico did. However, Rico did leverage the social capital that existed through his friendships. In fact, he was able to speak with and obtain more informal information about UC Davis through the mother of one of his friends, who coached a different women’s sport at UCD and was someone Rico knew he could always go to if he had questions about the campus.

Discussion: Key Influencers

All of the students I interviewed were driven and had clear goals, some more academically based, and others had other priorities related to going to college. In all instances, their responses indicated that they felt qualified and prepared academically and were genuinely focused on finding the best fit. In Griffin et al.’s study (2012), parents played a critical role as influencers during every stage of the college choice process (although the students in that study identified as Black immigrants, whereas none of the students in my study did). In addition, I found no clear differences in aspirations between African American males and females among my study participants, as was the case for Smith and Fleming (2006).

Freeman (1999) pointed to the influence of the student themselves and their family on their perceptions of going to college. While many of the students in Freeman’s study noted that college was never presented to them as an option, the students in my study had their sights set on going to college at the predisposition stage. This is the first of three stages in Hossler & Gallagher’s college choice model where students decide that college is an option they want to and should pursue. Exposure to higher education through campus visits and tours was more prevalent for the students who were not first-gen, but all of the students I interviewed had clear goals and aspirations to – at minimum – obtain a 4-year degree; several of them specifically planned on going beyond, such as attending medical school. For the

two students in my study who enrolled at an HBCU, as with the students in Griffin et al.'s study (2012), they chose well-known, prestigious universities as part of their choice set.

Overall, this theme in my findings points to the importance of social capital, who has it, how it is leveraged, and how it influences student college choice. In my literature review, I referenced Farmer-Hinton's (2008) analysis of social capital related to college planning and the extent which school-based resources and support systems were helpful to students of color. In this study, encouragement to attend college came from parents and families overall, while first-gen students received much guidance from their schools. For the first-gen students in my study, I too found that their support came from schools, outreach, and academic preparation programs, and other connections such as university administrators, as well as from family friends for several students. Whereas family and community served as encouragement in the study of Farmer-Hinton (2008), for my students these were critical networks for social capital. Teranishi and Briscoe (2006) also pointed to racial stratification and social capital as well as the need for the alignment and further integration of these concepts to help frame and better understand student perceptions and interactions with those among their communities and networks who serve as agents of information, access, and inclusion. For the students in my study, their existing agents of social capital did not directly influence them to enroll at an institution other than UC Davis. Rather, they influenced students to tap into information, resources, and people that could best inform each student's own decision making. This was of particular significance as it related to the role of the church with Zakiyah, as well as to the outreach and academic preparation programs that Nate and Rico leveraged. Additionally, the social networks that the students in my study tapped into reflect a need that several students perceived for other students to be able to access them. For example, several students recommended greater outreach to and opportunities for Black students and communities of color to visit campuses and participate in special programs designed to increase representation at the

University. Their focus was not so much on themselves but rather on how their peers and future students who do not have access to the same resources could be better engaged.

In terms of the role of the church, faith-based communities and community-based organizations, an opportunity exists for greater connection using Zakiyah's experience. Furthermore, there is an opportunity for the University to place greater focus on partnering with these communities. CSU holds a Super Sunday. UCLA has an initiative that works with the churches through an area within the Associate Vice Provost for Enrollment's portfolio. This is an untapped area within UC that deserves a more specific and intentional focus. This also provides insights into the role of community-based organizations and other programs that help engage youth at all levels and can serve as strong partners of colleges/universities for building the educational pipeline, thus supporting access to higher education. A gap in the literature that I previously highlighted was the role of outreach, academic preparation programs, and community-based organizations in African American school choices. This study makes evident how critical these working relationships and partnerships with schools and universities are as they are a vehicle for expanding awareness, and their staff and programming serve as direct agents of social capital. This also aligns with Acevedo-Gil's *college-conocimiento* which posits that there are other phases following Hossler & Gallagher's predisposition and search phases, yet before the choice phase, that influence Latinx student college choice. In this model, influencers include secondary schools, along with family and others who serve as agents and sources of information about college (Acevedo-Gil, 2017). Based on the findings in my study, high schools and outreach programs would fall within this category. An interesting observation from the role that outreach and academic preparation programs play in the college choice process was the direct and indirect support they provide to students, particularly students of color. In this instance, the participation of Black males and males of color had a direct and significant impact on these students' engagement with UC Davis and exposure to the UC system.

In terms of counselors, the notion of getting to know the student really struck me. It speaks to the importance of relationships and the role that school leaders do and/or can serve. This aligns with the school and community context of Perna's (2006) conceptual model in which high schools, through their structure and culture, can help advance or hinder a student's progress toward enrolling in college. Farmer-Hinton (2008) also highlighted the important roles of teachers, counselors, and other school staff as influencers of where students applied to and enrolled. In my study, there appeared to be some influence on where students applied, which came from school staff as well as outreach and academic preparation programs. However, at the choice stage, this influence was not as present and students made their own decisions. In the case where one student reached out to their counselor for guidance, the support received was simply help in guiding the student to reach their own decision. Unlike the students in the study of Teranishi and Briscoe (2008), who noted how many of the students were discouraged by their school counselors to attend UC, I did not hear of this being the case from any of the students in my study. Briana did mention that her counselor was realistic with her regarding what she could accomplish, but supported her nonetheless. This is an area that stood out to me, although we did not drill down into the details. Her counselor also helped Briana with goal setting, provided access to scholarships, and supported her through the process of making her final decision of where to enroll.

This leads into the role of the high school College and Career Center itself, which is to serve as a central location to support students in accessing information on college, how best to apply, and all other aspects for supporting students in their college choice process.

Theme 4: Community, Climate, and Connection

It wasn't anything that UC Davis did in particular that made me like, 'No, I don't want to go there.' As I told you, it was my second choice. It was just had to do with, I got a better offer here, and it was culturally better here. And the specific track I'm on, the psychology pre-med track. I

don't think I would have gotten that same attention or specific training for what I want to do. –

Tammy

Several of the interviewed students had some sort of direct connection to UC Davis in terms of people they knew who were either alumni, staff, or administrators. Some had contact with current students, although the degree of engagement and familiarity varied. In this section, I provide insights into what students shared regarding their perceptions of the campus climate and diversity at UCD, along with what connections existed between them and the UCD community. I begin with the students' overall connection with the campus as well as the diversity and inclusion.

Sense of Belonging and Connection

In one form or another, all of the students I interviewed touched on a desire to have a sense of belonging. Some stated this more directly than others. They all wanted to see that the representation of Black students was good and that at least the Black community was strong. The most helpful information that Keisha accessed when determining whether to apply to UC Davis was information that she received about the African American culture and the knowledge that she would feel supported. Diversity and campus climate were also crucial to all of the students I interviewed. This was defined a little differently for some. For example, Rico really wanted to attend an institution where he could “better the community and benefit from community.” Another important factor in Rico's decision of where to attend college was attending a school that he could benefit from as well as contribute to in terms of supporting diversity and building community, which he felt were things that both UC Davis and Ivy1 offered. Rico did find the UCD community to be welcoming, indicating on a scale of 1–10 that he rated UCD as an 8 or 9 in terms of feeling welcome and UCD being a welcoming environment.

I wanted to be able to go to a community where I could better that community, and where I could benefit from that community. And for me at Ivy1²⁶ a good majority of the football team,

²⁶ Pseudonym for the Ivy League at which Rico is enrolled.

and matter of fact any athletic team is African American, or just it's extremely diverse on the sports teams to be specific.

Overall, the campus diversity and community were viewed by the students I interviewed at two critical points, both as applicants and as admits. In terms of applying, even though the total number of Black students was not as high as some of the students wanted, this did not deter them from applying. For example, at the point of making a final decision, Tammy weighed the racial representation more heavily. In response to a question about how the information she gathered had influenced her decision to apply, Tammy shared the following:

Okay. So, I liked the college town. I'm down in Davis a lot. I really enjoy that. The people seemed nice. I mean, I'm from the area, so it was familiar. I didn't know a whole bunch about the school. I just knew it was a good school, good STEM. It was close to home, and I would be taken care of there. I didn't have any doubt about them not being able to provide for me. It was just whether or not I would feel comfortable.

Tammy ultimately felt that the university she chose was a better fit culturally. Rico shared how he wanted to be viewed not as an athlete but rather as a complete person – as a scholar and student first and foremost. This is something that he felt both UCD and his Ivy did this well compared with another reputable private university in California he was being recruited to.

...I just was looking for a place where I felt like I was coming in, not only as a football player, but as a human and a student first, where at other schools it really wasn't like that. I was also getting recruited by Stanford and it was the same. It wasn't necessarily the same thing as Davis, but they'd given me a walk-on offer, and they really haven't talked to me before or after that. And it was just like 'Here, if you want it you can take it. You're a good football player. We wouldn't mind to have you.'

In terms of how welcoming she perceived UCD to be, Zakiyah rated UCD a 7 out of 10, with 10 being the most welcoming. She felt that UCD was a great campus; it was physically beautiful with beautiful buildings, as was the housing offered, but she felt that the campus was not progressive enough.

The small town is nice enough for some people, but it's not... I don't want to use this word. For lack of a better word, progressive enough. Yeah, I can't have a better word to use. I'd say progressive enough. It's a great campus, beautiful campus, beautiful buildings, and living situations, and everything. Very nice campus, but I feel like the atmosphere isn't completely welcoming, compared to the HBCU where I'm attending.

Zakiyah and Tammy both enrolled at HBCUs and both had similar observations about the campus. They thought UCD was beautiful and strong in their area of academic interest as both are in STEM. However, it did not appear to be as welcoming as their HBCU. Both were looking for a community with a greater African American presence. Neither pointed to a specific experience at UCD that made them feel this way, yet it was something that stood out. Aligned with having a sense of belonging is exposure to the campus that a student is considering attending. This often occurs through the campus tour or visit, which Sean and most of the students I interviewed spoke about.

Campus Tour and Campus Visit

I divided the campus tour and visit into three categories: formal, informal, and none. The formal tour refers to the official tour launched via the UC Davis Welcome Center, which houses the campus tour program. Rico, Nate, Keisha, and Sean all participated in a formal campus tour. For Keisha this was coordinated through her schools' BSU, whereas Nate mentioned that this came through the SMASH program. Rico's tour was through football, whereas Sean scheduled a tour in which he and his mom participated while visiting Northern CA. On the same date as his UCD visit, he also headed to the Bay Area to visit UC Berkeley. Regarding informal tours and visits, Tammy mentioned growing up "Go Aggies" and her visits were more informal, such as attending sporting events or coming to campus for

other purposes, but not the formal campus tour. None of the students mentioned taking the virtual tour online, which is and has been available. Brianna was the only student who did not participate in a tour or campus visit, whether formally or informally.

Real campus engagement from Rico's description was limited to the tour provided by the football team, which was highly comprehensive, as well as attendance at a few football games that he received tickets to. He also talked to a couple of UCD students. In terms of UCD representatives who visited his campus, a coach visited Rico at the high school he attended in Sacramento before transferring to another regional high school. Tammy gleaned some information from her campus visits but did not go on a formal tour, indicating that she purely visited UCD for leisure. She did not feel that this was a big deal because she knew how good a school it was and would be able to get in-state tuition. Briana did not participate in a campus visit to UC Davis nor many of the schools that she applied to and leveraged the campus websites to glean most of her information. She said the website was the most helpful resource that she tapped into. Sean felt genuinely welcomed and that the school wanted him there. During his campus visit, he obtained general information about what UCD was about and offered. He found the tour guides to be very nice and described his visit as follows:

Well, it was hot, so I guess, but I'm not deterred living in SoCal, no, all the people there seem pretty nice. I know college students are going about their business, but no one had a problem with me being there. Our tour guides were all very friendly. Everyone was super helpful, not just the normal like, welcome, we're trying to get you to give us your money, but actually, we want you here, it'd be really cool, and we'd be excited to have you join us. I got one of your shirts, I think it has a bike on it.

Sean recalled how he was made to feel rather than the name of any particular individual. He remembered some people's roles and where he connected with people, such as tour guides, staff at the

UC Davis Welcome Center, and staff and students on the housing tour and at the campus bookstore. He also noted some of his interactions with students from the African diaspora.

If you're looking [for] specific names or titles, I do not remember. As far as general information, let's see, there was one student who was black, and she worked in the student store and she was super-duper friendly. There was, I think we had two tour guides that we had talked to.

Some of the staff at the front desk, if you will, where the tour starts were helpful. When we did the housing tour, talking to those staff. We might've spoken to someone else and one of the other students stores who was working there. And I think, honestly just a few other students around campus that also likely were of African American heritage.

Other things Sean noted as important and that stood out during his visit included housing, campus activities, the on-campus food court, and the bowling alley. All of his observations focused on student engagement and community. Sean noted that he was on a time-crunch the day of his visit, as he was also traveling to the Bay area to visit UC Berkeley the same day and had some driving to do. These experiences were built into his formal campus tour experience.

Keisha was active in the BSU at her high school and visited the UCD campus twice, once on her own and once during her senior year of high school with the BSU. She received much information from UC Davis about the campus and the Black community, which she liked very much. Keisha felt strongly that getting this information to more students who are not involved in the BSU would be helpful for them to learn more about the University. As Keisha described, numerous students are not able to go on these trips and not all Black students are in the BSU. Keisha used the UCD website extensively to obtain more information about the campus and spent much time surfing the Internet. In terms of connections, it was through the formal campus visit with the BSU that Keisha connected with UC Davis staff. During her visit with the BSU, she was able to connect directly with the UC Davis community and valued hearing

from the staff and people on campus who enjoy working here. This was crucial, and such information solidified for her that she wanted to take the time to apply.

Zakiyah visited UCD toward the end of 9th grade. She said that the visit did not play much of a role in her decision to apply because she already knew that she had applied. Her campus tours occurred when she was a prospective student early on in her high school career and again in senior year when she was applying. At the point that she was admitted, Zakiyah did not visit the campus again; although COVID-19 did not allow for this, she did not participate in any of the virtual admitted student activities that took place either. Her visit was a campus tour that she took on her own rather than with a school or an organization. Visiting the campus is one of multiple ways that the students in my study determined what institution would be the best fit for them. Another was having spaces where students can connect with peers and a community who look like them. This leads into the importance of Black spaces.

Black Spaces and Black Representation

Beyond academics, the campus climate and particularly spaces for Black students were extremely important to Briana and one of the reasons that she prioritized research on BSUs. She referenced this in the context of PWIs, which I expand on in the following section. UCD was viewed within the context of being a PWI and that there was not an expectation that the Black population would be large. However, it was critical to Briana that there was a community of people who looked like her. This included having a BSU, something that she researched extensively online for any University she was considering to determine how important the BSU was to the campus and how active the organization was. Briana wanted to make sure of the following: (1) that there was a community that looked like her; (2) that those spaces, communities, and organizations were well-funded; and (3) that those communities had a powerful voice on campus.

Super important. That's why I made sure that there was an active BSU on campus. I know it's difficult with a lot of PWIs, I'm not going to find a super high Black population on campus, but I

just needed to know that there were communities for people that look like me on campus and that those are well-funded, and the voices of those people were amplified on campus.

As such, it was important to Briana that the institution she attended had spaces for Black students on campus and that those students felt comfortable. On a related note, Briana felt that it was important to see that the University also reflected and had “Diversity of Thought,” which she described as including differences of opinions where students can learn from people and debate accordingly with people who come from different places and backgrounds. This diversity of thought aligned with Rico’s desire to attend a community that he can grow from and contribute to.

Briana also recalled receiving a pamphlet from UCD early on at a college fair that had a section on diversity, but the most detail she found was online, noting that the campus website had good information on student life and information on the campus BSU. She looked for how important and active BSU appeared to be on campus.

PWIs

Another phenomenon that arose during my interviews and aligned with the desire to have Black spaces was the number of students who not only looked at UC Davis as a PWI (this was not surprising) but also referenced UCD specifically as a PWI and lived in neighborhoods and/or attended secondary schools that would be bucketed under the PWI experience. This was a common theme among the students I interviewed whether explicitly stated or not. Students shared their experiences of coming from communities where there are very few Black people, where they attended schools with very few Black students. This is the PWI experience that I am referring to. Tammy wanted to be around more people who looked like her, noting the following:

I was one of like five or six Black girls in my grade for the majority of my life and that was kind of traumatizing, so I knew that I wanted a different experience, so I decided to go to an HBCU....[this] was a constant reminder that I had to pay attention or be cautious of what I say,

how I act because I felt I had to represent Black culture wherever I went....I wanted a different experience and just a different environment, so I didn't have to be so on-guard every day or ask someone [not] to touch my hair or various things like that [which was another reason she wanted to go to an HBCU].

In addition, Tammy shared that she felt safer at an HBCU. This stemmed in part from some of the discriminatory incidents she had witnessed committed by her peers against other students because they were of a different faith or ethnic background, and from not feeling that her school handled these matters adequately.

I just felt safer at an HBCU knowing that if I get picked on it's probably not going to be because I'm Black. It might be because I have a big head or something like that but it's not going to be because I'm Black, because I'm Christian, or because of where I come from.

Nate described his experiences as an adolescent attending school in the city of Davis as fairly negative, being the only black student in his classes and encountering some racially charged situations. These experiences coupled with some less-than-positive experiences in the community while participating in SMASH, a program primarily comprised of students of color, shaped his perspective on the climate.

Well, for me, I feel like it's a different case just because I lived there for a couple of years. And also, because my mom works there, so I've been at UC Davis for more years than some of the people going there. So, I feel like I really knew the campus well. In addition, I knew the city well, just all the experience that I've had there, and it's always been really negative ones. So that's the feeling I've got through all the information I gathered.

Yeah, so first I went to middle school there and I went to part of elementary school there and that was a really hard time for me just because I'd be the only black student in all those classes. And people would say stuff like, 'Oh, go back to Africa,' like racial slurs, so that's the environment I really feel like when I'm in the city of Davis. And there's been times during the

SMASH program where we went to downtown Davis and people would follow us in the stores and things like that. So just being in that environment, kind of gives you an off-putting setting in that area.

Despite not feeling welcome in the City Davis community, Nate still applied to the campus. Regarding the main reasons for Zakiyah not attending UCD Davis, the primary driver was the percentage of African American students, which was too low for what she desired. Zakiyah attended a high school that she described as predominately Latino but still with few Black students. She wanted to be around many black people.

Campus climate and student demographics were paramount to Zakiyah's decision. Other than the demographics, UCD was the perfect fit for Zakiyah as the campus provided her with a generous financial aid package, her major of interest was a top program, and the location was what Zakiyah described as "not bad" given its proximity to family in the area.

It was very important to me. That was my top thing when choosing colleges, because otherwise UC Davis would have been the perfect school for me. The financial package was very generous. My major that I chose, they have a great program, one of the top programs for my major. The area is not too bad because I have family there. It would've been a pretty good choice or fit, if not the demographics.

It ultimately came down to the percentage of African American students. Zakiyah wanted to be in an environment that had a larger community of Black students. In terms of the specific aspects of diversity that were most important to her, Zakiyah shared the following:

It's really just a percentage of kids that look like me around me. I know that when my parents attended, there weren't very many people who look like them around them, very few and far between. I just would've liked a bigger community and more people.

Faculty Who Look Like Me

Zakiyah was the only person I interviewed who specifically pointed out the importance of having faculty who looked like her. This did not influence her decision of where to enroll but has since become an important aspect related to campus climate for her. Again, Zakiyah acknowledged that this was not among the reasons that she did not attend UC Davis; rather, she discovered how much she valued having Black faculty and staff after being enrolled at the University she is attending. While this did not influence her decision not to attend UCD, it did reinforce her decision to attend the HBCU, and in essence gave Zakiyah confirmation that she had made the right decision. As a Black female, she valued having African American female instructors.

That includes faculty and staff. I did not realize that it did until I chose HBCU2,²⁷ but having teachers that look like me, African American female teachers, has become really important to me as I've done education. I think the last time I had an African American female teacher was middle school, in sixth grade. I really enjoy the bond and the relationship that you get, different from having a white male or even a white woman, a Latino woman. It's a different experience in class. I do think that is important, to have faculty that look like me also.

While she did have teachers who were women and women of color, this was not the same for Zakiyah as having a faculty member who looked like her and who she could more directly relate to. Again, at the time of making her decision this was not a very high priority; she noted that if she had to rank the level of importance, it would be third or fourth priority. The key influences that Zakiyah identified as driving her decision of where to attend college were prioritized in the following ranked order: (1) African American students and environment, (2) location and being in a fast-paced area, and (3) faculty who looked like her.

²⁷ Pseudonym for the University at which Zakiyah is enrolled.

Black student enrollment numbers were a common aspect that all the students I interviewed considered and valued as important. None had high expectations in terms of the overall number, but for approximately half it was the number of African American students being lower than what they desired that served to influence their decision. This notion of a critical mass influenced their perceptions of the campus climate. Sean felt comfortable speaking with UCD students and believed that while the Black community was small, it was close knit and there was support. Kiesha appeared to make a similar assessment in connection with her campus visit through the BSU.

Location

Location was a consistent theme and subtheme. As it relates to community and climate, some of the students I interviewed loved the location of Davis, others seemed to think the community was too small, while others wanted to be in a faster-paced urban environment. Nate pointed to this in his decision to attend UC Berkeley. Zakiyah opted for a faster-paced location rather than an environment that she described as a rural and “slow town.” During our interview, she shared that location played a large role:

I am from Los Angeles, so not very slow. Pretty fast-paced, pretty city. Davis from what I remember, I used to live there when I was younger and I was actually born in Davis, was not... It was [a] small-town, really community kind of type. It's a small town. Metro Atlanta is definitely not as small of a town. It's definitely not as fast-paced as Los Angeles, but it's not as slow as Davis.

Overall, approximately half of the students enrolled at institutions that were located in larger, more urban communities such as Berkeley, LA, and Atlanta.

Engagement, Outreach, Communications, and Marketing

The students I interviewed provided many insights into how they connected with the University and obtained information. They also shared what they felt UC Davis did well, could do more of, and/or

could improve with respect to engagement with students considering enrollment. Some of this has already been addressed in prior sections of my findings. In the following subsections, I outline the remaining key areas that they noted, beginning with early connections.

Earlier Connections. Briana recommended that the campus facilitate more opportunities for connection earlier on in the process. This included opportunities to connect with current students well before admitted students had to decide where to enroll as well as reaching out more to students as applicants. For example, she wanted an email or phone call from a current student 1–2 months after submitting her application. Having this come from a UCD student in particular was important to Briana as she viewed them as more real and relatable. She also recommended that more current student outreach before students applied would also be nice.

An email or a phone call, and then that way I could... just because a student is a lot more separated from the campus than an admissions rep that I could go talk to or whatever, so I could feel like the opinions I was getting from the student were a lot more real relevant to me as a potential student. And so, it would have been nice to get outreach with that a little bit earlier on, like maybe a month after I submitted my application, or 2 months. Because I got the call-in late April, I think, or mid-April, and it would've been nice to get that call a little bit earlier, yeah. This was similar to Nate and Sean's suggestions regarding greater outreach and more workshops on applying to the campus.

Messaging and Personalized Experience for Students and Families. In terms of information, Rico shared that he did not receive anything special from UCD. He did get all the emails and he always read the information because he was highly interested in going to UCD. Rico noted feeling special and well taken care of by the institution that he decided to attend, and although he did feel supported by and well-connected to UCD, his overall experience in terms of the information received was the same as that which any other student who applied to UCD would receive. Along with making sure that “he was

good,” the institution he now attends also took care of Rico’s family when they visited along with any corresponding follow-up questions and needs they had. The second he found out what an Ivy League was, Rico wanted to go to one stating that the “family aspect is what stood out. But yeah, like I said, pretty much the family aspect for me definitely is what stuck out at Ivy1.”²⁸

Website and Student Voice. Briana, like the other students I interviewed, obtained much information from the campus website, which she emphasized was helpful, clear, and had everything she expected. Briana shared that the websites at most institutions are fairly similar. To that end, she recommended increasing peer-to-peer engagement and elevating the voice of current students as she felt that having the opportunity to speak with a student would give the detail that she desired, which would not otherwise be possible to obtain from a website. The student conversation would feel more authentic, and she would be able to get advice and learn what the current students identify as being their favorite things about the campus.

Access to Information. Keisha and Nate talked about how important it is for more students to have access to the information, campus visit, and program opportunities that they would be able to take advantage of. Both felt strongly that the University should provide students with more access to information and greater exposure to campus. While these two students talked about this more explicitly, the observations that some of the other students I interviewed shared also implied it. For example, Keisha talked a great deal about how she was able to access information and expressed genuine concern for those who did not have the same opportunity to access such information. She shared several ways that the University could help to address this to ensure a broader reach to more students through email along with social media. Keisha highly recommended this approach to align with how students today access information, with Instagram being the recommended platform. Keisha shared how many students her age use and will follow colleges on Instagram. She also shared how email

²⁸ Pseudonym for the Ivy League Rico is enrolled at.

should continue to be utilized, although it is starting to be less prevalent, and that receiving text updates would be more efficient than email. In terms of frequency, she did not suggest texting students more than a few times a week and recommended once a week or once a month.

More Student Voices, Specifically on Diversity. Briana recommended that UC Davis provide more student opinions about diversity on the website. She shared that having this as a form of outreach would be helpful. That outreach could be by email, phone, or video.

[D]iversity is something that I think it'd be cool to have more student opinions about diversity on the webpage, or as a form of outreach. Maybe a student that's focused on diversity on campus in whatever way, to reach out to other students would have been cool.

For Briana, the campus seemed welcoming. There was nothing that signaled to her that UCD was not a welcoming environment. However, since Briana's primary method of research about the campus and diversity was through the campus website, she shared that she could not have a negative opinion because all of the information that she received and accessed on-line was positive. Similarly, Tammy did not see any concerns with being welcomed as an African American student because the information she found on the website was all positive. She alluded to this as not providing balanced feedback. My interpretation is that Tammy felt that things cannot be positive – there must be some areas for improvement. She expressed how it would have been helpful to have that information available on-line along with information on how the University is addressing areas that need improvement.

I mean the only research that I did was the website, the research that I did on the website, and like I said earlier, the website isn't going to put whatever negative experience a black student may have had on campus on that website.

Students were also looking for more support through webinars and other forms of communication to help them learn more about the campus.

Clarity and More Support. Sean recommended other ways to reach out to students, which included hosting various webinars before or during the application process such as application tips and tricks. Sean did not see this as a college's job but felt that if UCD could provide additional support for the UC application, then that would be helpful. This would include having staff help with technical aspects of the admissions application and assistance navigating through completion of the FAFSA. Sean, like Zakiyah, also recommended getting information to counselors who can funnel out the details to their students.

[O]ther ways to reach out to kids though, I guess if there's any ways to do various webinars before or during the application process, one, just highlighting the school. Not that this is necessarily a college's job, but then if there's any way that UC Davis could provide additional support to the UC application, that might provide incentive. So, just different, not even workshops, but going through different tips and tricks. Maybe having UC Davis alumni going through things that they did to get in. If there's any staff that can help with the technical things, or helping with FAFSA, given that costs are a really big part in where people decide to enroll in colleges.

Similar to Sean, Briana suggested more help for students when applying as she found the whole process slightly confusing.

Yeah, I think that would have been nice too. Because when I was applying to schools, I was a little bit confused throughout the whole process. A lot of websites have super similar things, like they go into majors and you get information on majors, but you don't know like... obviously the website is going to uplift the school the best or give it the best reputation.

She began receiving more information in the way of emails once she applied and after she was admitted. This included a couple of emails about Black student organizations on campus.

On the UC Davis website. On the UC website, really. Once I applied, I got a lot of emails from UC Davis with more information. I even got a couple emails about the African American student organization at UC Davis's campus. I also got emails about that, too.....They're just like, 'Come join this group of black kids on this campus.'

As Zakiyah researched diversity, she obtained information through the following sources: online pamphlets, websites, and Niche. Zakiyah was the second student to talk about Niche. Zakiyah described coming across the platform as she researched scholarships, and from there she obtained additional information about colleges. Regarding what resources were available to Zakiyah in learning more about the diversity and campus climate at UC Davis, she responded as follows:

Just pamphlets online where it shows you the pie charts and everything. But not much other resources that are current, just websites and research on Niche, which is the college rating website. That's pretty much it.

I actually came across it [Niche] applying for scholarships. They have a scholarship that they do every month, and when I was applying for scholarships, I came across their platform.

My impression from what Zakiyah shared is that she had to work too hard to get the information. There was no information sent to her, and the information she received did not outline the most critical information she was seeking very clearly. "All the opportunities and links I saw, I had to research for. They weren't sent to me or very clearly outlined, and I feel like they can definitely do better on that," said Zakiyah. To improve upon this, Zakiyah begrudgingly shared that more emails would be helpful: "Some ways that could be improved? I hate to say it, but more emails. Most people don't like emails, but more emails would help with different opportunities."

With all of this said, Zakiyah still determined that if there had been a higher percentage of African American students, she probably would have given UCD greater consideration.

What Other Universities Did to Attract These Students?

A few students pointed to specific approaches that other universities adopted that appealed to them and recommended that UC Davis may want to consider similar approaches to attract more Black students before they apply and also when they are deciding where to enroll.

Getting in Early. Nate pointed to a couple of universities that admitted him or communicated with him early, which he found can make students feel wanted and valued, and this ultimately may help many students choose UC Davis. He also suggested more celebration, comparable to the Signing Day that athletes have.

I don't know. Maybe some type of... I don't know. Sometimes our school does signing days for athletes, so I don't know. Maybe signing days for kids in high school, just so they feel like it's a bigger feat and there's more of a celebration for all the hard work they've done. In addition, is getting in early. Harvard called me, personally and Berkeley admitted me early as well. So just doing that thing and coming first, I feel like can really be helpful in having someone decide because it really makes you feel like, 'Okay, this school really does want me and I feel like this school really does value me.' So admitting kids early, I think, could really help them choose that school.

UCLA Strategy. Sean noted a strategy that UCLA implemented and served as a big draw for him and his mother, namely a Black Excellence Luncheon. He was invited by the campus to attend this event during the summer before his senior year in high school. The luncheon included faculty, staff, and department representatives, and Sean described receiving good advice on how prospective students can situate their high school careers in the best possible light in preparation for going to college. By the end of the event, Sean felt as though UCLA was the right place. Prior to this, it had been a dream school for him but there was no direct connection. This extra step really made an impression on him – it built his excitement for the campus.

One thing that UCLA did that really hooked me. I visited one time for some STEM workshops with a family friend who's a year older than me. So, this was when I was a sophomore. And then we had done the housing and the campus tour, which were also really cool. So, we'd been there a few times. And then towards the end of the summer, before senior year, they invited us to a luncheon, meet and greet type thing, put on by, I think, a black parent organization.

And the whole thing was recognizing African American excellence in the youth and finding a way to get as many of those potential applicants into UCLA doors. So, there was a lot of faculty there that we could talk to, specifically admissions or different of major departments. And then they also had, just good advice for, how to make our high school careers the best that they could be.

And so, by the end of that, I went home with my mom and I was like, man, they're calling me.

Sean's Mom, who shared a few points in the background during our interview, reminded him to share his experience at the lunch with me, unaware that he had already done so. This reflected the impact that this event had on his mother as well, and likely on other parents of prospective students. Her recommendation was for UCD Davis to host a similar effort.

She wasn't sure if I touched on that one event put on by the black parent organization, the luncheon meet and greet in UCLA. I was already headed towards UCLA, but that really sold me. And so, she was saying, if you want to increase, especially enrollment in our demographic, that you guys host some sort of events like that.

Sean described how this special event moved UCLA beyond the big name and made him feel connected to their campus:

Yes. Because for a while UCLA was big name school and people were like, Sean's going to go places. So, UCLA was the right answer. And I looked into it and then I was like, okay, UCLA is the right answer, because you're capable of getting in. So, you should just try that. You don't know

where you want to go or what you want to do, that's a good option. And then visiting, and especially that event made me feel this is where I'm supposed to be.

He stressed how events such as the luncheon that UCLA offered for Black students could be a beneficial approach for all UC campuses.

Discussion: Climate, Community, and Connection

Every single student I interviewed displayed a commitment to access and inclusion. They were all very willing to share their story and insights for helping the University to increase African American representation, even though they had decided not to attend UC Davis. Sean's comments captured the essence of this and were also reflected in his mother's engagement behind the scenes, which was a treat. He stated the following: "Like I said, I'm very appreciative of you trying to figure things out and help us, also good luck in all of your personal endeavors. My mom enjoying herself from background."

The findings in this section point to the ways that student choice is informed by racial differences, as was noted by Teranishi and Briscoe (2008). Regarding perceptions of climate, in Contreras et al.'s study (2015), many of the students perceived the UC system to not be welcoming. This, coupled with the low enrollment of Black students, served as key factors in students' decision not to enroll at a UC. This was reinforced in my study, reflective of the ways in which students consider the fourth layer to Perna's (2006) conceptual model – the social, economic, and policy context –weighing the costs and benefits of enrolling at a particular college. Some variation also existed in how welcomed students felt. Some expressed feeling very welcomed, whereas others viewed UC Davis as not being unwelcoming – a slight but important contrast. From both vantage points, this appeared to be within the context of managed expectations related to enrolling in a PWI where they did not expect an overwhelming number of African American students and considered the campus being welcoming to be possible for the type of institution and in the current times and political climate. One student, however, did specifically share circumstances that led them to experience the Davis community as unwelcoming.

This stemmed from encounters that spanned from early adolescence through their high school years. At the same time, this student viewed the campus in a positive light and offered recommendations to help the campus increase its exposure to the African diaspora and communities of color.

Different from the students in Contreras et al. (2015), many of my study participants did not appear to have immediate concerns about feeling alienated due to the campus enrollment numbers; however, they did want to see more Black students on campus. Comeaux et al. (2020) applied a critical race theory lens to understand the enrollment decisions of Black freshman admitted to UC in 2015. Similar to the students in my study, they found that one reason for students declining their offer of admission to a UC campus was a low percentage of students of color, which they described as a lack of compositional diversity (Comeaux et al., 2020). Related to campus racial climate, the authors noted how the study participants were acutely aware of the impact that compositional diversity, including Black student enrollment, had on “the institutional commitment, sense of belonging and overall satisfaction of students in college” (Comeaux et al., 2020, p. 15). One student in my study also questioned the level of inclusivity based on the direct outreach she received as a Black student. I got the impression that she wanted to ensure that support and programming would not be separate or isolated for African American students in a way that was less than what the broader student population received. By contrast, there were other students looking for this more targeted outreach.

Students in Contreras et al.’s study (2015) were also seeking affirmation from UC that Black students were welcome and wanted through more interaction with the campus, without which they received a contrary message. This was not so much the case in my study. It did not appear that most students wanted more affirmation than Black students. One wanted to see that there were Black spaces such as student organizations, an institutional commitment to supporting these spaces fiscally, and Black students having a voice on campus. Again, Nate felt that the low number of Black students did not reflect what he wanted, but his major was the primary driver of his decision. Related to student

perceptions, Smith and Fleming (2016) pointed to ways in which many of the students in their study who came from lower socioeconomic backgrounds expressed a sense of hopelessness, whereas Black students from private schools perceived their public-school peers to be intimidated by the idea of going to college. By contrast, all of the students in my study appeared highly confident in their abilities and future opportunities for success, in what they will bring to a university environment, and in the value of the skills and talents of their peers. They did not give any impression of students being intimidated by going to college, let alone with enrolling at a UC, Ivy, or any other highly ranked university. In fact, these were the types of institutions they were all considering. This speaks to how they viewed the quality of a UC Davis education, which was being weighed by these scholars among other exceptionally high-caliber and highly ranked institutions.

Chapter 8 - Recommendations and Next Steps

In this chapter, I provide recommendations based on the key findings aligned with the four primary themes highlighted in Chapter 7, namely Cost & Affordability, Academics & Career, Key Influencers, and Community & Connection.

Theme 1: Cost and Affordability

Promote Scholarships and Other Ways to Pay

To address the findings in this study around cost shared by the students I interviewed, along with the SIR-No Survey responses, UC Davis could provide admitted students and their families with more consistent and frequent information about the financial aid process and scholarship opportunities, particularly those scholarships that are specific to the campus. This is where investing in more marketing and communication support for the FAS office would be beneficial as it could also provide more content to students around work and study, including examples of the specific types of work–study opportunities that are available and how they can support and align with students’ future career goals. In partnership with the Internship and Career Center, the FAS office could also highlight the internship opportunities available to UCD students, and also how those opportunities can either help cover some of their costs as a student or at least serve as an example of the Return on Investment (ROI) from attending UC Davis.

Predictability and Cost Estimator

While the FAS office may have limited control over the expected family contribution that a student will need to cover, an opportunity exists for the campus to help students have more predictability in terms of cost. One such opportunity is to promote the cost estimator calculator more broadly, which would help students and families better predict and plan for the costs associated with paying for college in advance. This includes describing what the cost estimator is to students and families as well as how it can be used as a resource. Keisha and Nate provided strong examples of how

the cost estimator has been used. Their experiences represent the desire of many students to have more examples of how the actual next price to pay for college can vary. Keisha, for example, was looking for more examples of the different ranges in what students and families may actually have to pay. I would couple this with examples from students and families who may be willing to share how they covered the Expected Family Contribution (EFC). This is not intended to scare people away but rather to give them more options. This needs to be done in a manner that does not provide any false expectations as each student's circumstances differ, and what one student and their family pays does not dictate what another might pay. The goal here is to address any apprehension, fear, and anxiety, providing the full breadth of opportunities for paying for college coupled with the ROI for investing in a UC Davis education. This strategy could be implemented in part through videos and downloadable pamphlets as well as working with schools and districts.

Other Driving Factors

In addition to cost, based on my findings the campus should consider and address the other driving factors that are important to Black students, whether or not those students view cost as a key consideration in their decision to attend UC Davis. By addressing other key drivers that influence Black student college choice, the campus would demonstrate the full breadth and depth of opportunities available, thus making a student's decision to decline their offer of admission more difficult. My recommendations in the remainder of this chapter address those factors. For students such as Nate and Zakiyah, significant consideration was given to their major as well as having a clear trajectory for their future careers. They also wanted to see greater representation of the diaspora as they felt the campus did not have a large enough Black community. Additionally, all of the students in my study were seeking more direct connections in some form with the Black community on campus. This included greater interactions with Black students and organizations, alumni, and faculty in the respective majors, careers, and/or disciplines that these students were interested in pursuing.

Veterans and Military Dependents. For students like Sean who are military dependents, the campus offers the opportunity to lean into other factors that are important to them and their families. This would entail establishing a targeted communications campaign and investing in other forms of outreach in collaboration with the campus Veteran's Center.

Communication Through Other Methods and Platforms. None of the students in my study indicated attending a FAS workshop or information session offered by the campus. Many found their information on the website or through other platforms. As such, I recommend building out the website presence and leveraging other modes of communication to connect with students. This includes intentional and targeted email campaigns along with short videos conducted by current students trained by FAS, and other messaging specifically focused on parents and families regarding ways to address costs. Enrollment Management, by way of FAS and UA, has an opportunity to meet students and families where they are at by investing in platforms such as Niche, which students already use frequently to obtain information on attending and paying for college.

Invest in and Partner with Outreach Programs. As demonstrated by Rico and Nate's experiences, outreach programs work and can help build the K-12 to higher education pipeline. They provide a wealth of information to students and serve as a critical access point. Services provided through outreach programs, even for students who are not formally enrolled in those programs, have the potential to reach broader audiences. Strengthening these partnerships goes beyond costs and covers comprehensive collaboration with existing outreach and academic preparation programs at UC Davis to help build a diverse pipeline of students. For example, as it relates to paying for college, the FAS office could partner with these programs, specifically targeting student participants and their families before and after they apply for admission to help with the FAFSA and address concerns and questions around costs, loans, debt, and their ability to pay for those who are admitted. In addition, with the appropriate resources and infrastructure, the Office of Admissions and Enrollment Management has the

opportunity to more intentionally collaborate with these programs at UC Davis, within the UC system and across the state, to more closely align outreach efforts with campus enrollment goals to increase student diversity, including successfully enrolling and retaining more Black students. As cost is a crucial consideration, this would include the provision of information leading up to the admissions application, along with ways to help students and families plan early, followed by more targeted outreach after they have submitted their admissions application. The Transfer Opportunity Program at UC Davis did this well, hosting a series of financial wellness workshops for transfer applicants from their program who applied but were waiting for their admissions decision as they still needed to file the FAFSA. I support greater peer-to-peer connections; I recommend that the FAS office develops and trains a team of ambassadors who can help to implement some of these workshops and informational sessions while professional staff focus on processing financial aid packages received by applicants.

While my recommendations are specific to UC Davis, I believe that an opportunity exists to leverage being one of nine undergraduate campuses and embarking on greater systemwide collaboration for admission and outreach, particularly for this subpopulation. This would include setting diversity goals at the systemwide level for the outreach programs that report up to the UC Office of the President to better align with UC's strategic framework to "eliminate equity gaps in degree attainment and achieve a student body that reflects the diversity of California" by 2030 (University of California, 2019). In the case of UC Davis, this would entail shared resources and the appropriate staffing to facilitate these strategic partnerships.

Additionally, I recommend specific investment in SAYS to include goals/priorities that support regional outreach/recruitment and help build the pipeline. SAYS is well-connected to the community, especially regionally. I recommend building upon the work of the Office of Admissions with their community-based organization (CBO) forums and CBO Day that was previously piloted, along with launching a faith-based initiative, similar to what is established at UCLA. I also recommend taking into

account the efforts at CSU as there are still many Black families that are connecting to the faith-based community, and as we saw with Zakiyah, this was a significant network for her. This will all require appropriate resources and investment both in staffing and programs, in conjunction with the necessary lead generation and communications tools. This involves partnerships across campus, systemwide, and with other institutions and programs.

Theme 2: Academics and Career

Greater Promotion

Greater promotion of the UC Davis story and the academic reputation outside of California would help to elevate campus exposure to broader audiences. Keep in mind that attracting more Black students outside of California also means addressing costs to get them to say yes and accept their admissions offer given the additional nonresident tuition that students and families outside of the state must cover. I also recommend establishing a communication strategy with the colleges and other appropriate campus partners that takes a threefold approach, focusing on majors and careers in STEM, non-STEM, and the intersection between both areas. The students in my study who applied to STEM majors conducted more in-depth research but were still looking for additional information.

Furthermore, I recommend that UC Davis shares the campus impact with broader audiences and spaces and through various media, including Black public media. This includes more information on Black student success, career opportunities, and successful pathways leading to professional/graduate school. Where there are unique or distinctive academic tracks that lead to certain careers, the campus should tell that story more. Reaching local students will also entail communicating how being close to home can be beneficial and still enable students to grow and have new experiences.

Career Connections

I recommend that UC Davis works with the Internship and Career Center and Alumni Association to build greater internships and work opportunities. Several opportunities already exist. The campus

should do a better job of communicating this in a meaningful way that ensures that students who are looking to go to a professional school, particularly in fields that align with graduate and professional programs. The campus should also outline a clear roadmap of preparation through their undergraduate curriculum, research opportunities, and internships to be successful, which will lead to successful matriculation into competitive graduate and professional schools. In particular, where there are existing programs to support (or establish its own dual-degree programs) preparation for current UC Davis students to be competitive applicants for the campus' own professional programs, these should be highlighted to broader audiences and enhanced if proven to be effective. The campus should also explore opportunities to establish dual-degree program such as the program that Zakiyah mentioned at the HBCU she enrolled at.

Consistency and Clarity

One key recommendation from several students I interviewed was for the campus to be more consistent in outlining a clear path for what courses students can take in high school to prepare for their major and come in with college credit. Given that this information is available online and through webinars offered by UA, my recommendation is to identify additional means to get this message to students and families as well as to newer college counselors at the high school. Helping applicants before they apply would entail collaboration with the Colleges at UCD and the campus Internships and Career Center (ICC), such as by leveraging the Big Ideas initiative²⁹ through the ICC. I recommend that this partnership also include campus orientation and consist of broader communication on what students should expect once enrolled at UC Davis and how to get a leg up on how to enter the University with more college credits. I also suggest that this should include more visual representations of research and student experiences conducting research.

²⁹ UC Davis Big Ideas Aggie Launch <https://bigideas.ucdavis.edu/career-development>

Where things are working well, the campus should continue to do so and do more of it. An example is the communication about the academic advising and support available to biology majors that Briana spoke of. Furthermore, more information should be shared about the various career and professional networks that come with obtaining a UC Davis education. This includes connections with alumni and industry, successful job placement for students who want to go straight to work after graduation, and admissions rates for those who want to go to graduate/professional school. How the curriculum and related opportunities lead to medical school admission and other related fields should also be demonstrated. The campus reputation speaks for itself. Its reputation is distinctive enough to get a fairly broad range of competitive students to apply but not quite enough to get students such as the ones I interviewed to say yes. These students seem to have just enough information to know that it is a good or even a great school to attend, but not enough to be genuinely blown away sufficiently to be confident in saying yes to UC Davis. In terms of student demographics and enrollment, where the numbers are not as high, the campus should share what it is doing to address this and how current students are being supported. Regarding academic stereotypes, this is a benefit but can also be a barrier to attracting students who are not looking into majors that UC Davis is presently known for.

Theme 3: Key Influencers

Training

More training should be provided by the campus and UC system for high school teachers on admissions requirements, including English teachers who may provide guidance to their students on writing their college essays or, in the case of UC, responding to the personal insight questions on the UC application. The campus should also continue to work with counselors, but it needs to reach out to teachers, including but not limited to English teachers and those who also offer college success classes or administer assignments focused on college preparation. Most counselors have general information about the admission and application process. However, unless they are alumni, they have less

information about the campus itself. This can be changed. In the past, UCD hosted counselor tours. I recommend revisiting and developing more robust counselor engagement and specific counselor sessions and materials that can be downloaded online. I also recommend establishing a Counselor/Teacher Advisory Board, which can help to ensure that the admission and enrollment team has a formal communication loop with schools. I also recommend continuing to partner with the undergraduate College as well as more partnerships with profession schools. A blog can also be started that is managed by current students. The campus can make sure that all school personnel have a certain level of information. Peers in particular also serve as a support network; thus, I recommend creating a tips sheet or even a short video on how to be a strong support network without telling students what to do or where to go. Things to consider include a pros and cons list. Parents and families must remain a targeted audience who are marketed to directly and included in the opportunities for student engagement.

Partnerships

There are many Black students who the campus may wish to reach but do not attend high school visits, such as my study participants. Even though partnerships with schools are critical and school visits may be beneficial for enrolling some students, my findings demonstrate that reaching Black students requires moving beyond the general school visit. It requires connecting students and their families to UC Davis through on-campus visits and partnering with programs such as the Statewide BSU. Additionally, Sean's experience with the influential role that his place of work played in his choice process reflects an opportunity for the campus to establish corporate partnerships. Using Sean's place of work as an example, collaborations could be arranged with restaurants or chains, working with their corporate offices to establish internships with the University for students interested in business; alternatively, these corporations could be guided in strategies for hosting college and career fair opportunities for their employees who are students looking to go to college. Alternatively, these

strategies could be used as a means of community outreach and engagement. Something else to consider is students who want to continue working for the same company when they go to college and want to know if that business is located in the Davis area or see how they can transfer their skills to a similar location on or near campus. More important is the opportunity to demonstrate how attending UC Davis is an opportune time for students who may need or want to work to gain new professional experiences and develop broader skills through campus jobs and internships that align with their future career goals.

Camps Visits, Events, and Greater Exposure

Putting more students on campus has been limited by COVID-19. However, as the campus opens back up, investing in the campus units, programs, and events will be key. Along with ensuring ample staffing to support the coordination and implementation of recruitment/yield efforts and events management, cross-campus collaboration with programs already serving schools is recommended. COVID-19 has broadened the scope of how engagement can occur, but this does not replace the need for in-person experience. With the appropriate investment, some of these programs can support the K-12 pipeline and collaborate with other campus entities to boost the retention and successful graduation of Black students.

CBO Day – Faith-Based Initiative

As previously shared, church is still a key space for civic engagement and community outreach. An opportunity exists for UC Davis and the UC system to launch a faith-based initiative along with enhancing efforts with community-based and other outreach programs including those mentioned (i.e., College Track, EAOP, SMASH, and SAYS) as they have hosted programs such as the SAYS Summit and the EAOP's Achieve UC event, which Nate participated in and increased his exposure to campus. For the students in my study, these outreach programs were also spaces where Black males such as Rico were

well supported. To ensure sustainability, it is crucial that these collaborations are approached as campus partnerships and priorities that include but would not rest solely on the UA office.

Ambassador Program

Given the desire expressed by the majority of students I interviewed to connect with their peers, I recommend that the campus develops an ambassador program focused on the African Diaspora. This is something that we piloted in UA in 2020–2021. I recommend developing a program where students who are interested in careers in higher education can job shadow. My findings also point to a strong interest from admitted students to connect their major and their career. In response, I recommend that the ambassador program, once established with undergraduates, be expanded to UCD alumni ambassadors. UA already collaborates with the Cal Aggie Alumni Association. However, there is currently no position in place to oversee and coordinate a formalized ambassador program in partnership with the Alumni Association. As alumni ambassadors are identified, given the number of students who indicated having teachers and counselors who are UCD alumni, I recommend that the ambassador program specifically recruit teachers and counselors to participate, along with CBO/outreach program staff. To ensure that efforts and strategies maintain a peer-to-peer focus, I recommend that collaboration takes place with current UCD students including the Student Recruitment & Retention Center.

Aligned with an ambassador program, I recommend the establishment of a 1-year fellowship available specifically to new UCD graduates and/or UCD undergraduates who have just graduated in an effort to support outreach and peer-to-peer connection. This will have the added benefit of providing employment and work experience for recent graduates and would include a mentorship component from campus leadership within and outside of Admission and Enrollment. Additionally, I recommend a partnership with Graduate Studies with a focus on integrating graduate school recruitment with aspects of recruitment of undergraduates where applicable, particularly as admitted undergraduates are deciding where to enroll. This would help the campus to get an early start on cultivating more Black

PhDs and address the desire among my study participants to have more faculty of color, particularly more Black faculty. This needs to begin early.

Theme 4: Community and Connection

Partnerships and Personalization

Regarding Zakiyah's point of having more Black faculty, and particularly Black women faculty, one key opportunity for the University is to establish an intentional partnership between UA and Graduate Studies to recruit more undergraduate people of color to graduate school. This recruitment can occur as part of the outreach and recruitment conducted with prospective freshman and transfer students. Just as there is a focus on building a diversity pipeline at the undergraduate level, this should be linked and extended to graduate and professional schools as these scholars will become future faculty. Graduate students can serve as mentors for undergraduates, while undergraduates can serve as mentors for prospective students. Furthermore, faculty and senior leaders serve as mentors for graduate and undergraduate students. UCD could implement programs such as "Experience UC Davis" to give students and families more direct experience that is customized, similar to the experience that athletes receive. Visiting the campus and learning more about the Black community at UC Davis may have directly influenced Zakiyah's perception of the campus. To this end, the University must also partner with the City of Davis and surrounding community to address experiences and perceptions such as those expressed by Nate, so that Black students feel safe and welcome.

Black/African Diaspora Taskforce and Greater Community Engagement

UC Davis has served as a leader across the UC system in efforts to support the recruitment and retention of students from the African Diaspora, which includes the establishment of the Center for African Diaspora and Student Success in October 2015, along with the implementation of key initiatives

to support this effort as noted in the 2015 African-American Initiative Report.³⁰ The Office of Undergraduate Admissions has also historically had a permanent position dedicated to the recruitment and yield of Black students. To continue its leadership trajectory within UC, and to maintain pace with other sister campuses that have double-downed on their efforts by hiring staff dedicated to the recruitment and enrollment of Black students, I recommend that this position be sustained. In tandem, I also recommend that UC Davis establishes a formal campus-wide Black/African Diaspora initiative overseen by a corresponding taskforce, similar to the current HSI taskforce, for investigating Black student representation and experiences at UCD from enrollment through matriculation. This taskforce would have representation from undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, and staff. Similar models exist at other UC campuses, including the UC Berkeley African American Initiative³¹ and the UC Irvine Black Thriving Initiative.³² Furthermore, I recommend that this newly established taskforce be co-led in partnership with a faculty member and the African Continuum and that it includes a strong student presence and alumni participation. The taskforce should collaborate directly with UA and UCOP, expand on former President Napolitano's African American initiative/committee, and directly work with community-based and faith-based organizations. This will require direct investment and the appropriate positions in place to adequately recruit, enroll, and support the successful completion of Black scholars. While I do recommend that the University hires a staff member to lead the recruitment effort and serve as a liaison on this taskforce, this cannot and should not rest on the shoulders of one or two staff members in UA who would have to divide their responsibilities among various other priorities outside of this initiative. I also recommend that the University directly leverages existing outreach programs to support this effort. Additionally, I recommend that UC Davis implements a "Fellowship" for recent

³⁰ UCD Davis 2015 African American Initiative Report

<https://studentaffairs.ucdavis.edu/sites/g/files/dgvnsk486/files/inline-files/AAI-Report2015.pdf>

³¹ UCB African American Initiative <https://diversity.berkeley.edu/our-work/african-american-initiative>

³² UCI Black Thriving Initiative <https://inclusion.uci.edu/uci-black-thriving-initiative/>

graduates who would like to obtain experience in higher education, including admission, enrollment, as well as diversity, equity, and inclusion. These fellows can serve for up to 1 year to allow them to experience outreach/recruitment, review applications, and support yield; then, they will be well positioned as strong applicants for future careers in higher education. This would also come with a mentorship component from campus leaders or professional staff members.

Racially Focused Emails and Events

Sending community focused emails to admitted students from the African Diaspora was something that one student thought UCD did well, but another student did not like it. Tammy felt as though these communications and emails were being separated and disconnected from the rest of the student body and she did not like that. By contrast, Keisha appreciated receiving this information. There were also students like Sean who really liked the more community focused events. Additionally, students such as Briana were looking for Black student representation on campus but also wanted to be in a community where there was diversity of thought. As these are not mutually exclusive, my recommendation based on this feedback is not to eliminate the messaging, but rather to adjust the strategy such that the community-specific messages and events are integrated into the broader messaging that all students receive.

Black Spaces and PWIs

Given the current social climate and racial unrest in the United States, something that struck me was how committed the students I interviewed were to ensuring Black spaces such as African American student organizations were present, that the institutional commitment was not only in words but also well supported fiscally, and that there was a strong community voice that was heard – and in Briana’s own words amplified. I think that this is a reflection of the times we are in and this generation of students wanting to be heard and not asking for permission but having this as an expectation. This may also be connected to the communities in which these scholars grew up and/or the secondary schools

they attended. Nearly half of the students I interviewed grew up in communities that I refer to as primarily White communities. Similar to PWIs, these are communities with very few African Americans and otherwise few people of color. They described how this influenced their perceptions of climate and why campus climate diversity mattered so much in terms of what they were looking for in their college experience. These Black spaces serve as counter spaces, as reflected in the study of Teranishi and Briscoe (2008), in which students coped with perceptions of not being welcomed, or by going to institutions outside of UC with much higher enrollment of students from the African Diaspora, such as CSU and HBCUs. While none of the students in my study opted to enroll at a CSU, two did enroll in an HBCU – one because they felt they would be more comfortable and wanted to be surrounded by the African diaspora in terms of the student body, including their faculty. For others, this immersion into a climate that reflected diversity within the diaspora was secondary to their other considerations (i.e., major, future career goals, and financial support). UCD does have a Black Space that is initiated and led by Black graduate students for the very reasons that Briana described. There is also the Center for African Diaspora (CADDs), the Cross-Cultural Center, and other spaces to connect at the intersection of identity such as the LGBTQIA+ and Women’s Resource center to name a few, along with the Student, Recruitment, and Retention Center. I recommend that steps are taken to provide greater exposure to these spaces for future students, their families, and programs. This should include not only board communication but also direct personalized connections through special visits and programming on campus.

Communication – Early and More

In terms of recommendations for what UC Davis could do more of or do differently, despite the findings regarding where the campus is doing a good job of communicating information, Nate pointed to early notification from an Ivy League that he was admitted to. Although he did not enroll there, it did catch his attention. Early notification is something that has been discussed at UC Davis, and more

assessments would need to be performed in this regard to determine the feasibility of implementing this approach for a future term. Where things work well, I recommend continuing those efforts. For example, to provide a more customized experience prior to COVID-19, UCD Admissions traditionally hosted programs such as Experience UC Davis, which were intentionally designed to engage with targeted URM communities in which the campus was seeking to increase enrollment along with other marginalized groups, such as first-gen and low-income populations. UA had strong yield outcomes from attendees in these programs. Regarding students who are not supported by their school, the University has an opportunity to partner more closely with school districts and to take steps to ensure the information provided is simple, succinct, clearly communicated early and often, and readily available in the appropriate platforms and media for students who lack additional support. The most crucial takeaway from my findings and recommendations is not to make students work so hard to get the information that they want and need, or that which they may not realize they need until after they have applied.

COVID/Virtual Environment

Due to the inability to attend in-person, many University recruitment and yield strategies have shifted to remote. This has required institutions worldwide, including UC Davis, to adjust how to engage specific communities in a genuine way that allows for the connection that would be experienced in-person. While it is difficult to replicate face-to-face on-campus interactions, UCD Admissions did launch a fall 2020 Black Excellence symposium,³³ which was a virtual experience featuring breakout rooms and panels with Black faculty, staff, students, and alumni. It covered topics ranging from major and career paths to leadership opportunities, campus resources, and tips on completing the UC application to support the recruitment and pre-yield of African American applicants for fall 2021 (a strategy similar to

³³ Undergraduate Admissions Calendar <https://www.ucdavis.edu/campus-life-things-to-do/calendar/academic/undergraduate-admissions-dates?trumbaEmbed=view%3Devent%26eventid%3D149451485>

that of UCLA). A similar event was offered in spring 2021 to support the yield of African American students admitted to the campus for fall 2021. In fact, UC Davis was an early model in UC for these types of efforts, which the campus must continue and enhance in order to remain competitive and at the forefront.

COVID-19 has required expanded interactions with key influencers as well as students. Building out further counselor and advisor connections and networks is another valuable opportunity. I recommend that a Counselor Advisory Board be established that can serve in a consultative role to keep the University abreast of the core needs and priorities of students, families, and secondary schools. Additionally, none of the students who I spoke with attended any of the spring online admitted student events. For example, Zakiyah did not participate in any online events or admitted student events for UCD. Tammy again shared that if COVID-19 had not been properly addressed at the University of her choice, then she would be on the UC Davis campus now, meaning that she would have accepted her admission offer to UCD. Communicating the campus plans for addressing COVID-19 early and often to prospective students and their families, even if final decisions are in progress, is an important step for ensuring future Aggies know how they will be kept safe.

Family Decision

In the world of admissions, we often share how deciding where to enroll is a family decision. This has not changed. The active and positive involvement of Sean's mother (in referencing UCLA's Black Parent organization) is a reflection of how important it is to engage with families. The intentional focus on and involvement of parents/families as well as investments in community-specific student organizations were crucial to many of my study participants. Aligned with parent engagement is making the student feel special. A key theme that is worthy of discussion was found in Rico's comments that the information he received was the same as everyone else received. In other words, he was not made to feel special. Rico did feel supported by and well-connected to UCD, but his overall experience in terms of

the information received was the same as what any other student who applied to UCD would get. This aligns with Nate's comments about earlier notifications and holding a signing day to make students feel as though the University really wants students to come. As a note, College signing day was an effort that UC hosted and funded across the system in spring 2019, which UCD hosted in conjunction with the annual SAYS summit (Easley, 2019). Following this, campuses could individually continue and fund this effort for future years at their discretion. If continued, with a modest campus investment to offset the cost for event and marketing support, my recommendation would be for UC Davis to consider integrating signing day with an existing initiative as was done in 2019.

What Students Should Own and What the University's Responsibility Is

I thought it was interesting that Sean did not seem to think that it was a college's job to guide students through the application process. In fact, this is the job of a college/university. Work is conducted within an admissions office to help guide students through the process of applying as well as to provide greater insight into what available offerings would make their university a best-fit campus for the student. Again, I think that getting the word out to smaller schools where the campus may not be able to visit is important. For example, Sean recommended that the campus could offer application tips and tricks workshops and other webinars. UCD does offer a wide range of webinars pre- and post-application, which tells me that we have an opportunity to get the word out to more students, schools, and counselors.

Student Peer-to-Peer Conversations

Briana's comments regarding wanting to speak with current students for the sake of authenticity left me with the impression that much of the information being presented online about the student experience may not be taken at face-value by prospective students. In other words, the website is nice but hearing directly from students and being able to have dialogue with them are critical. Students like Briana seek direct interactions with current UC Davis students beyond the positive

experiences highlighted on the website as this can be perceived as a disingenuous marketing strategy crafted by the University instead of the authentic student voice. This is not surprising and something that UCD does already. In a COVID environment, tapping into more platforms that allow students to speak with, text, and find other ways to connect directly with current students is important. UCD has implemented some strategies, and this is an opportunity to move these efforts forward to the next level. Peer-to-peer connections are also vital. For the fall 2021 yield cycle, admissions piloted a targeted ambassador program focused on URM populations, including a group of ambassadors focused on the African American initiative. As mentioned in the key influencers section of this chapter, I recommend establishing a more formal ambassador program in collaboration with the Division of Student Affairs, including offices such as the Student Recruitment & Retention Center.

Data Collection

I also recommend that UC Davis administer an Admitted Student survey to allow for a more comprehensive analysis of how the entire admitted student population is making their decisions, what strategies are most effective, and where there are opportunities for adjustment. Generating more targeted leads and investing in other online platforms and mobile apps focused on engaging students through the admissions funnel represent another key approach, which the collected data can help inform. This is aimed at ensuring UCD is on students' radar.

Chapter 9 - Conclusion

This study was an effort to better understand African American first-year student college choice at UC Davis – specifically why first-year Black students admitted to UC Davis decided not to attend. Driven by my own experiences as an African American woman, UC alumnus, and admissions and higher education professional with a commitment to access and inclusion, I was interested in learning more about why students from the African diaspora who were admitted to UC Davis chose to go elsewhere. In this chapter, I summarize why I initiated this study along with my key takeaways. I then present implications for policy and practice, and close with recommendations for future studies followed by how this study can be useful for UC Davis and beyond.

Why This Study?

“The University of California does not care about Black students!” As noted in Chapter 1, this was the perception expressed to me by a long-time African American school counselor nearly 2 decades ago, but it has stayed with me as I have watched the enrollment numbers of Black students at UC fluctuate with some modest gains, but there is still more to do. The reality is that access matters – race matters. As an African American woman from the bay area, UC alumnus, and first-gen graduate student, representation was and continues to be important to me and to so many others. As an undergraduate, the UC campus I attended had a small number of Black students. Although the numbers have improved, there have not been significant increases in the percentage of Black students enrolled at UC, and it is clear that more can and should be done. When I joined UC Davis, the campus was moving to the next level of commitment to key diversity initiatives to expand its enrollment of historically underrepresented students. While it has made strides, there is more to be done, and as the late Dr. Paul Heckman would often say to me and my fellow cohort members in the doctoral program, start with the why. If we want to know what we need to do to enroll more Black students, and if we want to know what we need to do to support student success and help ensure the students who we enroll graduate

and get their degrees, then we must start with the why. We have to start with understanding why we do what we do as practitioners and as a university in the world of admissions and enrollment. We need to understand why students are applying, why some are accepting their offer of admission, and why others are not. While there have been reports written, surveys completed, and we know a lot instinctively as practitioners from our years of experience of just doing the work, there are also numerous things that should not be assumed about why and how Black students considering UC Davis navigate through the college choice process and make their decision of where to attend.

Key Takeaways

For UC Davis specifically, the data indicated that enrolling more Black first-year students requires the following actions: (1) providing more information, earlier, and with greater frequency; (2) telling the UC Davis story better; (3) expanding awareness of scholarship opportunities and identifying barriers to paying for college or at minimum ways to neutralize concerns around cost; (4) creating more opportunities for direct connection with faculty, staff, students, and alumni; and (5) making a greater campus investment and an institutional commitment with the necessary infrastructure and measures of accountability to successfully recruit, enroll, and retain Black students.

Ultimately, some study participants benefited from having more personal and direct connections to the campus while others were looking for greater awareness and engagement. The takeaway was making their experience personal, knowing what the students were personally looking for in a college experience, determining how extensive their understanding was of how they could benefit from a UC Davis education, understanding what type of experience they anticipated having at the University as a Black student as measured through enrollment numbers and other methods of engagement, and determining how well the University conveyed this information.

We often talk about how critical cost is in the college choice process; yet I found that once cost was neutralized, it was no longer a driving factor. Among the students for whom cost was a driver, they

were looking for more information on how to make attending UC Davis more cost-effective and information on scholarships supported by the University. However, there were other core aspects that really needed to be addressed for students to truly feel confident that UC Davis was the best fit. Every student seemed to feel that they would receive a great education at UC Davis because they knew it was a highly regarded and reputable campus. One of the reassuring components of the interviews was how committed all of the students were to access from the onset. While all were from the African diaspora and students in high demand from other highly ranked colleges/universities, they were each very different in many ways. Yet, they expressed a clear commitment to increasing the representation of Black students at UC Davis and wanted to contribute to helping the University increase diversity in that regard.

Why is This Important?

This study is important because representation matters – because access matters. These undergraduate students are going to be future CEOs, doctors, lawyers, scientists, innovators, activists, researchers, and faculty. The students I interviewed wanted to see more students who look like them at the University, with one student specifically highlighting the need to see more staff and faculty who look like them. For that to happen, we must have a tighter grasp on what can be done to better appeal to those students who are competitive, who would be successful and thrive at UC Davis, and who would contribute to the vitality of the campus. This includes enrolling more undergraduates such as the those I interviewed, who will then go off to get graduate and professional degrees, come back to UC Davis or another institution to teach, and connect research and scholarship with practice. Or, as in the case of scholars such as Nate, Black students who know what they want to do should be enrolled. They will go directly into the workforce with the vision and skills to effect change in the workforce and community, thus creating opportunities for future scholars to see themselves as leaders and innovators in the workplace, and to know that they too can blaze their own trail for success and define what that success

looks like throughout their educational journey. It is critical that we attract scholars who will contribute to the various spaces of academia as well as the workforce, so that the next generation knows they belong and can bring their full selves to whatever institutions of higher education they attend.

This study was designed to remove any assumptions and directly get to the heart of “the why” regarding Black student college choice at a top-tier research 1 University such as UC Davis, so that we can indeed move to the next level of our goal of access and inclusion. I do believe that UC and UC Davis care about Black students. Now is the time for UC Davis to double-down on its commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. It is not enough to simply talk about it. We have to be about it, meaning that we demonstrate it through our actions, our commitment, and our investment. A commitment for the long haul with long-term fiscal and structural investments to ensure progress can continue, and we must ensure that key initiatives do not fall by the wayside or become stagnant as temporary or one-time investments run out.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The implications of this study have more to do with practice than policy from my perspective. There certainly may be opportunities to further explore admissions practices and identify ways to support university enrollment goals. In addition, my hypothesis is that the greatest implications may be related to strategies for recruitment, outreach, enrollment, and retention practices, and the corresponding investment required from the University and beyond to support this important initiative. In terms of enrollment, this would include the potential to inform and influence financial aid and scholarship policies and practices.

This study also has implications for future studies. For example, there is another group of students who are not even applying to our campus, either because they do not think that they will be able to obtain admission or because they find other options more appealing. This study, while focused

on admits who did not submit an SIR, can inform policy, strategy, and recruitment and outreach efforts to increase the applicant pool.

One key implication for policy and practice is that race and racism do influence student choice in terms of how students view the University as well as how they view themselves. It also underscores the key influence that counselors have on student choice and how they view themselves as competitive applicants. The political narrative not only impacts actual policy but can also negatively affect how students perceive themselves and the opportunities available to them. Freeman (1999) stressed this point as well in terms of the need for policy makers and educators to accept and recognize that race matters; it is important to research this further and identify solutions that address the unique needs of specific groups. In addressing parents' concerns about cultural awareness and the well-being of their children at college, there is an opportunity as policymakers and educational leaders to meet parents where they are to discuss these concerns and partner together in supporting their students to and through higher education degree attainment. Gao and Johnson (2017) also pointed to an important implication, namely the need for California to have a growing and thriving workforce, which requires gaps in educational preparation and other barriers to higher education attainment to be addressed, including disparities that exist that adversely affect lower socioeconomic, historically underrepresented, and first-gen college students.

Suggestions for Further Studies

Future studies should examine why Black students say yes to UC Davis. A parallel study should also be conducted among black transfer students and their college choice process. This is a critical audience, particularly in California given the number of underrepresented students at California Community Colleges. Moreover, as we have all navigated through a global health pandemic, a future study could focus on understanding how COVID-19 may have impacted the decisions of Black students and their college choice process. An opportunity also exists to study this more broadly in terms of the

entire undergraduate population of admits and how their college choice process differs along demographic groups. Additionally, future studies should further college choice within the diaspora and the intersectionality of identity. For example, whether we see differences for our students who are from the LGBTQIA+ community, or whether we see differences between black males in STEM compared with black males who are not in STEM majors.

Additionally, further study is required on the Native American community as a university sits on the land where indigenous people once lived, and those from Native American and Indigenous communities are significantly underrepresented in terms of enrollment. While steps have been taken in the office of admissions in partnership with the Native American Academic Student Success Center, and there are very dedicated, knowledgeable, and committed staff, there too needs to be a campus-wide initiative for appropriate investment. I recommend that future studies be conducted to better understand the choice process for native American students, their families, and communities, and also to identify ways to partner and increase scholars' access to higher education and successful degree completion.

Final Reflections

This study was an effort to better understand why African American first-year students admitted to UC Davis decline their offer of admissions. The objective was to help the University successfully achieve their goal of supporting greater diversity and representation of students from historically underrepresented minority communities and marginalized backgrounds, including African American students. This was also an effort to address the low representation of Black students in higher education nationally as a top-tier research 1 University with a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. If we are to address barriers to access, we must understand what those barriers are, and also determine what students are looking for and what their needs and priorities are as they navigate through the college choice process by asking them. This study also adds to the body of literature that is not quite as

expansive as it could be around African American student college choice; therein lies an opportunity to in fact build from the model of Hossler and Gallagher, to build from the models that have been developed by Acevedo-Gil and others, and to really lean into developing and establishing a model that outlines the considerations for Black students and their families in considering college.

As the admissions profession continues to evolve across the nation with more institutions becoming test-optional or test-free, as is the case for UC Davis, this is another factor that may encourage more students to apply. It is also possible that a shift in admissions offers could occur. Those outcomes are still to be determined. However, my study demonstrates that no matter how many students apply and are admitted, getting Black students to say yes requires full investment and commitment. It also requires greater communication of scholarships and ways to pay for a UC Davis education, as well as the fostering of genuine and trusting relationships between the University and future students along with their families and other key influencers. I believe that this study moves the University forward in the right direction.

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Appendix A

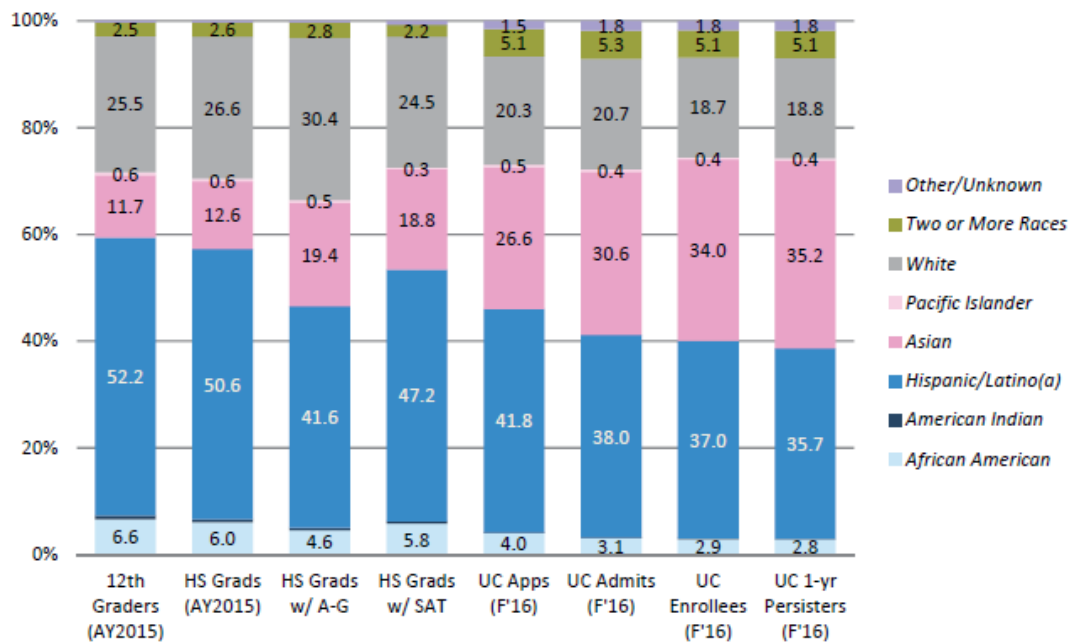
UC Accountability Report 2018

7.1.1 Racial/ethnic distribution of the UC undergraduate pipeline, University-wide, Fall 2016

new freshman cohort from California public high schools

Figure A1

Racial/Ethnic Distribution of New Fall 2016 UC Undergraduates from CA Public High Schools



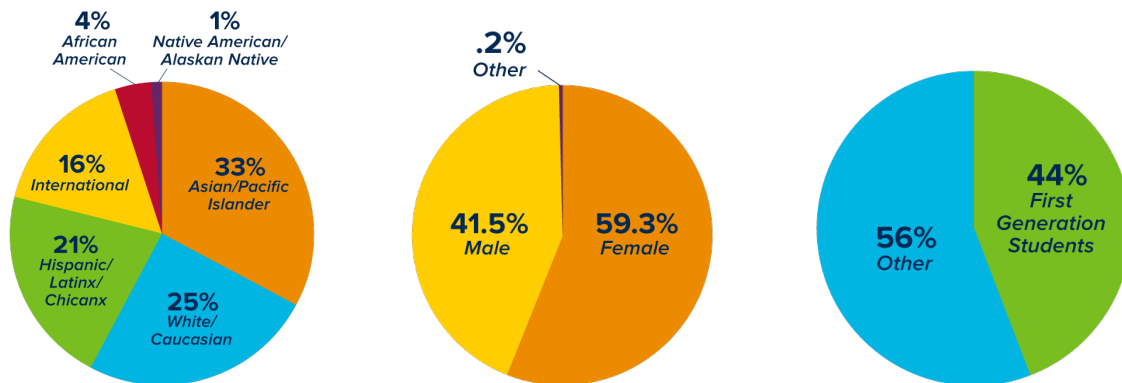
Sources: California Department of Education; College Board; UC Information Center Data Warehouse

Appendix B

Fall 2017 Undergraduate Student Profile

Figure B1

Percentage of Fall 2017 Undergraduates



(Source: UC Davis Undergraduate Admissions student profile)

(UC Davis Undergraduate Admissions , 2019)

Appendix C

Fall 2018 Undergraduate Admissions Statistics

Figure C1

2018 Admission Statistics

All ranges reflect the middle 50% of students admitted

Freshman

Weighted GPA

3.96-4.25

Unweighted GPA

3.74-3.96



41.2%
Admit Rate

SAT Total

1260-1460

Math **630-780**

Evidence Based
Reading & Writing **600-700**

ACT Total

28-33

Note: All ranges reflect the middle 50% of students admitted

*High school grade point averages (GPAs) are capped at 8 semesters. Applicants who have taken college coursework or attended schools that offer International Baccalaureate (IB), Advanced Placement (AP), or UC-approved Honors Level (HL) curriculum should refer to the weighted GPA.

Scores from the old SAT will be accepted for students who graduate from high school before 2020. For current applicants, the University of California will accept scores from the old SAT, new SAT with Essay, or ACT with Writing.

(UC Davis Undergraduate Admissions , 2019)

Appendix D

UC Davis Fall 2019 Enrollment Snapshot

Figure D1

Fall 2019 UC Davis Enrollment Snapshot

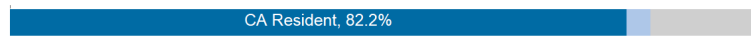
Fall Enrollment At A Glance

Academic Level: All
 Degree Program: Undergraduate
 Source of Support: All
 Fall Term: 2019
 Campus: Davis
 Broad Discipline: All
 Enrollment Status: All
 Choose demographic trend: Race/Ethnicity

All Students: Undergraduate Degree

30,982

California Residents



Gender



Underrepresented Minorities (URM)



First Generation (Undergraduates only)

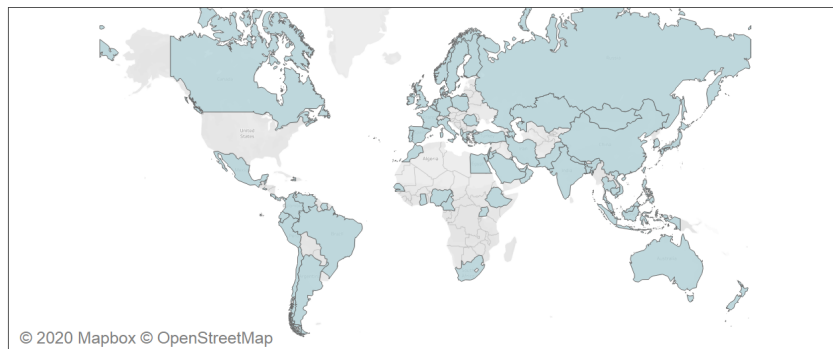


Pell Grant Recipients (Undergraduates only)

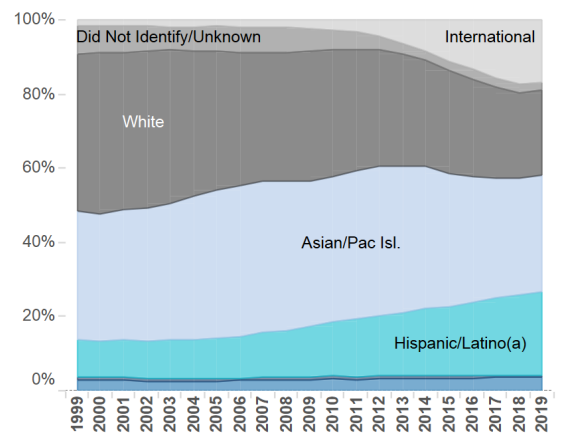


International Sending Countries

All Degree: Undergraduate



Demographic Trends All Degree: Undergraduate



Sending Countries for International Students

All Students: Undergraduate

China	3,345
India	275
South Korea	151
Taiwan	138
Indonesia	96
Vietnam	44
Japan	42
Saudi Arabia	41
Malaysia	35
Canada	32
Singapore	29
Thailand	24
Turkey	15
Mexico	14

Note: Enrollments do not include health science residents (housestaff). For information on health science residents, please refer to the data tables in the next tab.

(UC Info Center, n.d.)

Appendix E

UC Davis Fall 2019 Enrollment Snapshot (Cont.)

Figure E1

Fall 2019 UC Davis Enrollment Snapshot by Level and Ethnicity

UC Fall Enrollment Headcount by Level and Ethnicity

Location Davis		Academic Year Multiple values	Degree Program Undergraduate	Gender All	Enrollment Status All	Source of Support All
Student Level	Ethnicity	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Undergraduate	African American	950	1,002	1,055	1,101	1,138
	American Indian	211	200	196	185	146
	Hispanic/Latino(a)	5,209	5,822	6,318	6,715	6,998
	Asian	10,186	10,001	9,649	9,568	9,780
	White	7,810	7,689	7,422	7,178	7,077
	Domestic Unknown	722	748	714	715	654
	International	3,169	3,917	4,712	5,256	5,189
	Total	28,257	29,379	30,066	30,718	30,982
Grand Total		28,257	29,379	30,066	30,718	30,982

(University of California, 2020)

Appendix F

UC Davis Undergraduate Admissions SIR-No Survey Questions

Table F1

UCD SIR-No Survey Questions

UCD SIR-No Survey
QUESTION: Are you attending another UC campus? If so, please specify which campus.
Respondents could select one of the other eight undergraduate UC campuses: Berkeley, Los Angeles, Merced, Riverside, San Diego, Santa Barbara, Santa Cruz
QUESTION: Are you attending a non-UC campus? If so, please specify the type:
Respondents could select from one of the following options: California State University International university Private in-state university Private out-of-state university Public out-of-state university
QUESTION: I will not be attending a 4-year-college/university at this time. I have other plans. (Please describe). *Note: This is an open response.
Respondents could select from among the following options. If “other responses” was selected, students could write in a response: Planning to defer my attendance for a year. Delaying my degree for the near future. Transferring to UC Davis from a California Community College in 2 years. Other responses.
QUESTION: If you plan to attend an institution outside of the UC system, please specify.
Survey results indicated the number of responses indicating they were attending another college. Respondents also specified the name of the institution.
QUESTION: Why did you choose not to attend UC Davis? Please specify:
Respondents could choose from one of the following options. If “none of the above” was selected, they were prompted to write in a response. Academic quality Offered a better financial aid/scholarship package Cost Reputation Rankings Campus safety concerns Location

Major not available Personal circumstances None of the above
QUESTION: How did you rank UC Davis among your university choices? Other, please specify:
Respondents ranked UC Davis on a scale of 1–5. My note is that 1 is the highest and 5 is the lowest. I will need to confirm. Respondents also had the option to select “other” and write in a response outlining their reason for not selecting UC Davis.
QUESTION: Visited UCD before making decision not to attend (select Yes or No):
Respondents selected “Y” for yes or “N” for no.
QUESTION: Please specify the way UCD was visited.
Students could select any of the following options. If respondents selected an option that indicated “please specify,” there was also space for the respondent to write in more information. Visited the Welcome Center Attended a campus event, please specify* Took a self-guided tour Met with representatives from a college or department, please specify*
Visited with students or friends affiliated with UC Davis
Other visit to campus, please specify*
QUESTION: Any other final thoughts to share?
This was an open-ended question where students could write in a response.

(Source: UC Davis Undergraduate Admissions 2019)

Appendix G

Interview Protocol

Sample Interview Protocol Form

Institution: _____

Interviewee (Title and Name): _____

Year and term admitted: _____

Institution attending other than UCD: _____

Interviewer: _____

Introductory Protocol

Introduction – Purpose of Interview

Key areas to address:

_____ A: Interviewee Background

_____ B: Marketing & Communication

_____ C: Campus Climate & Diversity

_____ D: Academic Reputation

_____ E: Cost & Affordability

_____ F: Outreach, Campus Visit(s), & Engagement

_____ G: High School Context

_____ H: Key Influencers: Family, Peers, & Community

Other Topics Discussed: _____

Documents Obtained: _____

Post Interview Comments or Leads: _____

African American First Year SIR-No Interviews

Introductory Protocol

To facilitate my notetaking, I would like to video/audio tape our conversation today. Please sign the release form. For your information, only researchers on the project will be privy to the tapes which will be eventually destroyed after they are transcribed. In addition, you must sign a form devised to meet our human subject requirements. Essentially, this document states that: (1) all information will be held confidential, (2) your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and (3) we do not intend to inflict any harm. Thank you for your agreeing to participate. To protect your confidentiality, your comments will not be linked with personally identifying information. Additionally, your personally identifying information will not appear when I present this study or publish its results.

I have planned this interview to last no longer than 30 minutes. During this time, there are several questions that I would like to cover. If time begins to run short, I may it may need to interrupt in order to move ahead to complete the remaining questions. (National Center for Postsecondary Improvement, 2019)

Introduction – Purpose of Interview

As previously shared, I am conducting a study to better understand why African American first-year students admitted to UC Davis choose not to accept our offer of admissions. The goal is to better understand what is important to you as a future student and help inform the institution and my office regarding the needs of future students from the diaspora, where we can improve on providing critical information and also telling our story of what is available. I also seek to better understand how our institution is perceived and what we can do to support students and families in deciding whether UCD is the best fit.

You have been invited to speak with me today because your experience and perspective as an admitted student who chose to not to attend UC Davis can provide a great deal of information and insights regarding this topic. My study does not aim to critique your decision making. Rather, I am trying to learn more about what is most important to African American students and their families and hopefully learn how our office and campus can help improve in meeting the needs of future student during their decision-making process before and after they apply.

A. Interviewee Background

1. Why did you apply to UC Davis?
2. What were the primary reasons you decided not to attend UC Davis?

B. Marketing & Communication

1. What information did you receive about UC Davis prior to making your final decision?
2. Briefly describe how you obtained information about the campus.
Probes: How did this information influence your decision to apply?
What information was most helpful in determining whether to accept your offer of admission?
What information were you seeking that was not available and would have been helpful in making your decision?

C. Campus Climate & Diversity

1. How important was campus diversity to you?
Probe: What specific aspects of diversity were most important?
2. What resources are available to you in learning more about diversity and campus climate?
3. How welcoming did you perceive the campus to be?
Probe: Do you see any concerns with being welcomed as an African American student? Why or why not?

D. Academic Reputation

1. How would you rank UC Davis compared with the institution that you decided to attend on a scale of 1–5, with 1 being the highest and 5 being the lowest? Please describe.
Probe: What are your views of the academic quality of majors at UC Davis?
2. How important was being able to conduct research as an undergraduate?
Probe: Do you feel that UC Davis clearly conveyed the full breadth of opportunities available to you? Why or why not?

E. Cost & Affordability

1. How important was cost in your decision not to attend UC Davis?
2. What type of information did you receive from financial aid and scholarships?
3. What information was most helpful?
4. Was there information that was missing that would have been helpful?

F. Outreach, Campus Visit(s), & Engagement

1. Who did you speak with from the campus and what role did that play in your decision?
2. Did you visit the campus before deciding where to go to College? What type of campus visit was it (i.e., campus tour, decision day)?
3. Did someone from UC Davis visit your school or program? Please describe.

G. High School Context

1. Who from your school has been most helpful in deciding where to go to college? What type of information did they provide you with?
2. Describe any other advisors and programs that you participated in at your high school or outside of your high school?

H. Key Influencers: Family, Peers, & Community

1. What type of family input did you receive in making your decision?
2. What type of role did your friends play in deciding where you would attend college?
3. Who else from your community helped you in deciding where to attend college? Please describe.

Post Interview Comments and/or Observations

Interview – Demographic Survey/Questionnaire

To assist in coding the data gathered from our interview, I have developed a brief demographic survey for your completion. * Required

1. Email address *

2. First Name *

3. Term Applied to UC Davis * Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Fall 2020
- ☐ Other:

4. High School Name

5. High School City

6. Which of the following best describes the type of college/university you will be attending in the fall? Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Other UC campus
- ☐ California State University
- ☐ Other four-year college/university in CA
- ☐ Four-year college/university outside of CA
- ☐ Community College in CA
- ☐ Community College outside of CA
- ☐ Other:

7. Name of College/University you will be attending in the fall.

8. Do any of your parents have a 4-year college degree? * Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

9. Including yourself, how many people are in your household? Mark only one oval.

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5
- ☐ 6 or more

10. What is your approximate average household income? Mark only one oval.

- ☐ \$25,000 – \$49,999
- ☐ \$50,000 – \$74,999
- ☐ \$75,000 – \$99,999
- ☐ \$100,000 – \$124,999
- ☐ \$125,000 – \$149,999
- ☐ \$150,000 – and up

How do you describe yourself?

11. Which of the following best describes your background? Select all that apply.

- ☐ African American/Black African
- ☐ American Indian/Alaskan Native
- ☐ Asian/Asian American
- ☐ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- ☐ White /Caucasian
- ☐ Other

12. Gender Identity: How do you describe yourself? Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male
- ☐ Trans Female/Trans Woman
- ☐ Trans Male/Trans Man Genderqueer
- ☐ Gender Nonconforming, or Nonbinary Gender
- ☐ Different Identity

13. Please provide any additional demographic information that you believe would be helpful. Thank you for your time.

Appendix H

Additional Tables Research Question 1

Table H1

Most Popular Majors Among All Fall 2018 African American Freshman Admits

Major	<i>n</i>	%
Biological Sciences	123	12.13
Psychology	71	7.00
Biochemistry & Molecular Biology	52	5.13
Neurobiology, Physiology, & Behavior	52	5.13
Animal Science	42	4.14
Philosophy	33	3.25
Political Science	30	2.96
Undeclared/Exploratory Program	28	2.76
English	27	2.66
Undeclared-Humanities	27	2.66

Note: Reflects top 10 majors based on frequency.

Table H2*Most Popular Majors Among All Fall 2018 SIR-No African American Freshman*

	SIR-No	SIR-Yes	Overall	
Major	<i>n</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>n</i>	% Decline
Biological Sciences	99	24	123	80.49
Psychology	55	16	71	77.46
Neurobiology, Physiology, & Behavior	47	5	52	90.38
Biochemistry & Molecular Biology	44	8	52	84.62
Philosophy	30	3	33	90.91
Political Science	27	3	30	90.00
Undeclared Social Sciences	24	2	26	92.31
Animal Science	23	19	42	54.76
Economics	21	5	26	80.77
International Relations	21	4	25	84.00

Note: Reflects top 10 majors based on frequency.