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Admissions and Latino Representation at UC Berkeley

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Author

Chavez, Lisa

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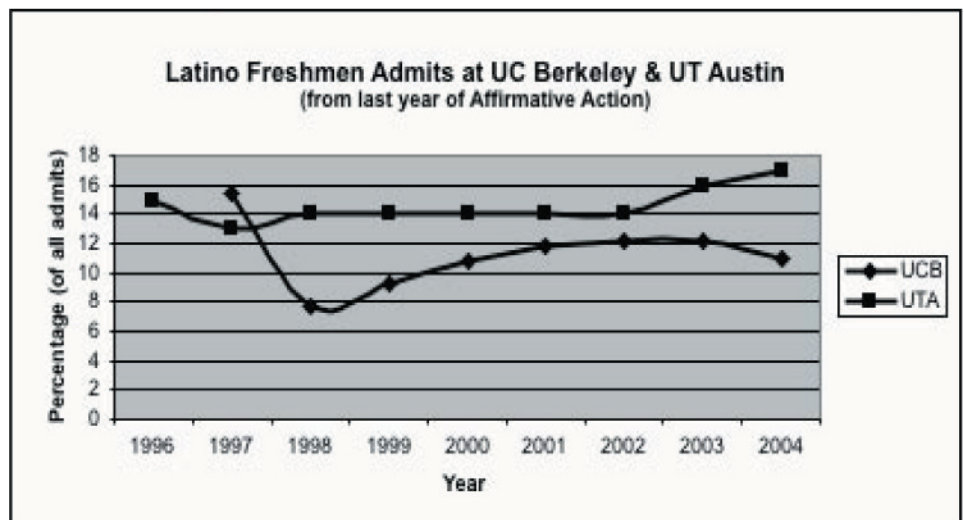
Latino representation among freshman at the University of California, Berkeley has not yet recovered from the loss of affirmative action. In 1997, Latinos constituted 15.4 percent of the students admitted to Berkeley. Then a UC Regents policy which banned the use of race and ethnicity in admissions decisions, known as SP-1, went into effect. In 1998, Latino representation declined to about 8 percent of Berkeley's admitted class.

In recent years, Latino representation rebounded, climbing back to 12.1 percent in 2002. This was likely due to two admissions policies: Eligibility in the Local Context (ELC), implemented for Fall 2001 admissions and Comprehensive Review (CR), implemented for Fall 2002.

The ELC admissions policy grants eligibility to the top 4% percent of each graduating senior class based on their successful completion of the a-g coursework series. An evaluation of ELC's first year estimated that this policy generated 2,065 additional applications, the majority of which were from underrepresented minorities.

Of the approximately 8,000 Chicanos/Latinos who applied to UC for 2001 Fall admission from participating ELC high schools, it is estimated that nearly 14 percent (or 1,120) were encouraged by the ELC policy. In other words, more than half of the ELC-generated applicants were Latino!

The CR policy allows campuses to consider both academic achievement and the educational and per-



In contrast to UC Berkeley, UT Austin has increased the number of Latino students admitted since the end of affirmative action in Texas. See story in box below.

sonal context framing this achievement. CR calls for a holistic review that goes beyond standardized test scores. Although it is impossible to measure the impact of the CR policy, the increase in Latino representation among students admitted to UC Berkeley was telling, climbing from 10.8 percent in 2000 to 12.1 percent in 2002, the first year of CR's implementation. Evaluation reports of CR also revealed that academic indicators among Berkeley's admit were the highest in years.

This was good news to advocates of equity in admissions. But it was alarming news for others. In Fall of 2002, John Moores, Chair of the UC Board of Regents, "leaked" a scathing report on UC Berkeley admissions, questioning the objectivity of CR. Largely focused on SAT scores, the report showed that 386 students were admitted to UC Berkeley with SAT I scores of 1000 or lower while 3,253 students with SAT I scores of higher than 1400 were rejected.

The report called for a "more objective" compre-

hensive review policy and explicitly stated that “UC Berkeley should have compelling reasons to admit applicants with an SAT I score under 1200 or those with a weighted GPA under 3.8.” Moores claimed that the low scoring students (who constituted 3.5 percent of the admitted class) “don’t have any business going to Berkeley.” Then in a Spring 2004 opinion piece for *Forbes Magazine*, Moores flatly stated that “UC administrators have been manipulating the admissions system and, I believe, thwarting the law,” in reference to Proposition 209 passed by California voters in 1996.

In response, the Board of Regents censured Moores (by a vote of 8 to 6) for violating the Regents’ protocol regarding public relations. And in an October 2003 letter, UC Berkeley Chancellor Robert M. Berdahl defended Comprehensive Review as the Regent’s admissions policy.

Berdahl further explained that the rejection of high scoring applicants was due to one (or more) of four factors: they had withdrawn their applications, they were out-of-state applicants, they had applied to competitive majors within the College of Engineering or had GPAs or other academic factors lower than other UC Berkeley admits. Finally, Berdahl noted, nearly half of the admitted students with SAT I scores below 1000 ranked in the top four percent of their high school graduating classes and were, therefore, eligible under the ELC policy.

The Moores’ report, nonetheless, had a predictable chilling effect on the comprehensive review process. In 2004, the number of Latinos admitted to Berkeley constituted 11.0 percent of the new freshman admits — as low as it was four years ago.

In brief, the role of the SAT in admissions deci-

sions, the concept of merit, and the question of access to UC Berkeley remain controversial issues. The context in which this discussion is taking place is similar to that of the mid-1990s when SP-1 was enacted: significant application growth, especially to the system’s highly coveted campuses, combined with stagnant freshman class sizes due to budget concerns and lack of space. How this policy discussion will ultimately impact underrepresented students, particularly Latinos, is an open question.

Lisa Chavez, Ph.D. UCB Office of Student Research

Center for Latino Policy Research-ISSC



University of California, Berkeley
2420 Bowditch Street #5670 * Berkeley, CA 94720-5670
510-642-6903 (phone) * 510-643-8844 (fax)
clpr@berkeley.edu * clpr.berkeley.edu



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