



affirming **EQUITY**
ensuring **INCLUSION**
empowering **ACTION**



EQUITABLE COLLEGE ADMISSIONS PRACTICES

The Urgency of Fair and Equitable Holistic Review of College Applicants

Authored By Michael Bastedo, Ph.D. Series Edited by Michele Siqueiros and Vikash Reddy, Ph.D.

The Campaign for College Opportunity



Preface

Over 50% of American students in our public schools are Latinx, Black, Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (NHPI), or American Indian/Alaska Native (AIAN). Tapping into their talent and ensuring their access to a college education is essential to our future economic power and the success of our multi-racial democracy. Despite the historical exclusion and current underrepresentation of many Americans in our colleges and universities, in June 2023, the Supreme Court of the United States severely curtailed the use of race in higher education admissions, prohibiting the consideration of an applicant's racial status as part of that process.

Race-conscious admissions helped ensure America's colleges and universities were more diverse. Without it, there is a greater urgency for college leaders and policy makers to review current practices for equity, and to identify solutions that provide a fairer approach to preparing students for college, admitting them, and supporting their success. Towards that aim, the Campaign for College Opportunity is releasing a series of briefs, including this one, as part of our [Affirming Equity, Ensuring Inclusion and Empowering Action initiative](#). The series will elevate practices that support the college preparation, admission, affordability, and success of Latinx, Black, Asian American, NHPI, and AIAN students, ensuring America does not return to an era of exclusion in higher education.

Overview

This brief is focused on holistic review, a strategy in college admissions that assesses an applicant's unique experiences alongside a range of indicators that include grades, extra curriculars, environmental context, among other factors. For admissions officers, it is a powerful tool and a fairer and more thoughtful approach to reviewing student applications and ensuring a more diverse student body. Promising policy practices in admissions can promote greater equity and access for students if admission officers and college leaders act decisively and with a commitment to a more thoughtful approach to college admissions. Colleges can use their own data to examine the disparate racial effects of their current practices and choose different enrollment policies and strategies to mitigate the effects of a ban on race-conscious admissions, in ways that are both legally permissible and more racially equitable.

The holistic review strategy generally involves evaluating an applicant in light of the opportunities available in that individual's family, high school, and neighborhood.¹ This model was very much influenced by the U.S. Supreme Court's past decisions on affirmative action. The justices repeatedly valorized and lauded higher education institutions that used holistic admissions practices and struck down programs that used quotas or point systems to admit students. Indeed, holistic admissions has been an adaptation by institutions to the legal pressures placed on them by the court that simultaneously seeks to provide some measure of fairness for racially minoritized applicants.

The **comprehensive review** policy at the University of California (UC), for example, identifies 13 factors that readers examine when reviewing each file, which is rated by at least two readers before every admissions decision is made. These factors include:

1. Grade point average (GPA) in college preparatory courses (called A-G courses)
2. Courses beyond A-G
3. UC-approved honors and Advanced Placement (AP) courses
4. Class rank (if they are top nine percent statewide or Eligible in the Local Context [ELC], meaning they are in the top nine percent at their own high school)
5. Quality of senior year program (determined using the number of academic courses a student takes and what type of course, e.g. AP, honors)
6. Quality of performance compared to others in the student's high school
7. Outstanding performance in one or more subject areas
8. Outstanding work in one or more special projects in any academic field of study
9. Recent marked improvement
10. Special talents
11. Completion of special projects
12. Academic accomplishments in light of life or special circumstances
13. School and home location

Students with disadvantages may be selected for **Augmented Review**, where they complete a detailed questionnaire related to their special talents, character, or compound disadvantages. Similar policies exist at selective colleges across the country, 95% of which use some form of holistic review.²

The holistic admissions strategy undoubtedly has important implications for racial equity in higher education. We do not have many studies on the outcomes of such programs, because they are very hard to identify, vary widely in how they are practiced, and are difficult to study with appropriate quantitative methods. A recent study of the UC's use of holistic admissions, however, is one of the best analyses we have, because we know that holistic review was implemented across six UC campuses for the fall 2002 admissions cycle. The author found that the UC's implementation of holistic review led to a seven percent increase in underrepresented students of color at those six campuses and was more effective at improving racial representation than ELC, which relies almost solely on class rank.³

Yet, even within an environment that permits race-conscious admissions — and California and eight other states have been important exceptions — the goal of racial equity has hardly been achieved. Despite the expansion of access to higher education for all racial and ethnic groups since 1972, the odds of enrolling in a selective college have declined for Black and Latinx students relative to white students.⁴ This is primarily due to academic competition — underrepresented racialized minorities have made substantial gains since the 1970s in their academic preparation for selective colleges, but privileged students have used their advantages to consistently remain one step ahead. Similar patterns are observed for low-income students nationally,⁵ but the UC and the California State University (CSU) systems have nonetheless been engines of upward economic mobility, with low-income students more likely to gain in their post-college job earnings relative to low-income students from other university systems.⁶

Achieving racial equity will be even more challenging after the Supreme Court ban on the consideration of an applicant's racial status as part of holistic review in admissions. The effects of California's Proposition 209, passed in 1996, and other state bans on race-conscious admissions are well established across the undergraduate, graduate, and professional school levels.⁷ Even within race-conscious admissions environments, implementation of holistic review is often ambiguous, inequitable, and inconsistent.⁸ Radical proposals for admissions reform, such as an often-proposed move to admissions lotteries, would have devastating impacts on racialized minorities.⁹ But there are options, if admissions offices move decisively to adopt policies and practices that are known to improve racial equity in admissions and advocate for their admissions colleagues — and presidents, provosts, and boards of trustees — to adopt them, as well.



To guide the campuses in their comprehensive review of applicants, UC faculty developed the factors listed below. All campuses place the highest importance on academic achievement in evaluating applications. However, the evaluation process and specific weight (if any) given to each factor can differ from campus to campus and year to year.

Factors the UC considers

The following criteria provide a comprehensive list of factors campuses may use to select their admitted class. Based on campus-specific institutional goals and needs, admissions decisions will be based on a broad variety of factors:

1. Academic grade point average in all completed A-G courses, including additional points for completed UC-certified honors courses.
2. Number of, content of and performance in academic courses beyond the minimum A-G requirements.
3. Number of and performance in UC-approved honors and Advanced Placement courses.
4. Identification by UC as being ranked in the top 9 percent of their high school class (“eligible in the local context,” or ELC).
5. Quality of a student’s senior-year program, as measured by the type and number of academic courses in progress or planned.
6. Quality of their academic performance relative to the educational opportunities available in their high school.
7. Outstanding performance in one or more academic subject areas.
8. Outstanding work in one or more special projects in any academic field of study.
9. Recent, marked improvement in academic performance, as demonstrated by academic GPA and the quality of coursework completed or in progress.
10. 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.
11. 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.
12. Academic accomplishments in light of a student’s life experiences and special circumstances.
13. Location of a student’s secondary school and residence.



Promising Policies and Practices That Make Admissions Review More Equitable

Across the wide range of policies and practices that constitute holistic admissions, there are opportunities to use a racial equity and justice lens to seek increased fairness and justice in the admissions process. Colleges — and their admissions and enrollment leaders — have the opportunity to use their own data to examine the disparate racial effects of these policies and practices and to choose a different path to mitigate the effects of the Supreme Court ruling on race-conscious admissions in ways that are both legally permissible and more racially equitable.

REVIEW APPLICATIONS IN CONTEXT

When the key to holistic admissions is examining applicant credentials in light of high school and neighborhood contexts, the quality of that context data is crucial. In past years, admissions officers relied upon class rank and profile sheets produced by high school guidance offices.¹⁰ Today, a student's class rank is often not provided by high schools, particularly at the highest and lowest SES high schools, and rank is calculated in a wide variety of ways that make it problematic for consistent and equitable use across applications. High school profiles, which provide a snapshot of a particular school's academic program, demographics and neighborhood, are also highly inconsistent, as there is no single template for what data should be provided, and these profiles are used for many purposes outside of selective admissions.

This presents a crucial gap for equitable decision making. The structural, compound, segregationist, and intersectional inequalities at American high schools — particularly racially and socioeconomically — are impossible to overcome without robust data on the environments that support and constrain applicants. When more robust contextual data is provided, there is evidence that this can impact how admissions officers make decisions about low-income applicants. In simulations with admissions officers, the officers were about 25% more likely to recommend admitting a low-income applicant when they were provided with high quality data on the applicant’s high school and neighborhood contexts.¹¹ An earlier policy shift in Colorado showed similar results,¹² and the UC system, upon adopting holistic review with very high-quality contextual data from California, also observed increases in the admission of underrepresented Latinx, Black, Asian American, NHPI, and AIAN.¹³ Context may also be helpful when interpreting letters of recommendation that counselors and teachers submit on behalf of applicants. Research has found evidence of bias in letters in the context of adult hiring, though research on letters of recommendation in undergraduate admissions is limited. Contextual information can help admissions officers differentiate between letters written by a counselor with a large caseload and those written by counselors who can devote more time to each student, for example. Recommendation letters can also provide crucial contextual information about individual, family, and high school circumstances that are not conveyed by the quantitative indicators or the essays because students often don’t know what to disclose or feel uncomfortable doing so.

Recent data on the adoption of **Landscape**, a high school and neighborhood data dashboard, at over 200 colleges, universities, and scholarship organizations, is our best data on the outcomes of contextualized holistic review. **Landscape** is a tool that provides standardized indicators of a student’s high school and neighborhood context. This information can be used by admissions officers to make more informed decisions about who to admit. Bastedo et al. found that when eight pilot universities used **Landscape**, they admitted more low-income, non-feeder school students, but were less likely to use the tool with feeder high schools.¹⁵ Mabel et al. followed up on this study by analyzing a broader dataset from 43 **Landscape** pilot institutions.¹⁶ They found that when colleges were provided with standardized information through **Landscape**, applicants from the most disadvantaged school and neighborhood contexts experienced a five percentage point increase in probability of admission

The adoption of tools like **Landscape**, which is provided by The College Board free of charge to institutions, holds promise to provide colleges with robust, high quality contextual data that can buttress equitable admissions practices. **Landscape** is currently used at public and private colleges, test-optional and test-free schools, and many Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs), including Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs), religious colleges, and single-sex colleges.



Landscape provides high school and neighborhood data to contextualize the application submitted by each student. Landscape data includes:

- High school location
- Senior class size
- Percentage of students eligible for free/reduced price lunch
- Average SAT score at colleges attended by students from the high school's three most recent graduating classes
- AP participation and average scores
- SAT/ACT high school score averages
- Neighborhood data on college attendance, household structure, median family income, housing stability, education level, and crime rates



REVIEW ATHLETICS PREFERENCES AND EXTRACURRICULARS FOR INEQUITY

At the most selective colleges, an applicant's extracurricular activities play a crucial role in the admissions process. Applicants to these schools are remarkably self-selecting in where they apply, and nearly all of them tout a near 4.0 GPA, high test scores, and a slew of Advanced Placement courses. As a result, their extracurricular activities often become a distinguishing factor.

Obtaining access to a convincing set of extracurricular activities and the ability to convey these activities' importance in a holistic review takes a great deal of social and cultural capital. The effects on admission probabilities can be quite substantial. For example, athletes are four times more likely to be admitted to elite private institutions than non-athletes,¹⁷ and at Harvard, recruited athletes are three times more likely to be white than Black, Latinx, or Asian¹⁸ Unsurprisingly, participation in athletics and other extracurricular activities is highly stratified, due to differences in high school opportunities, financial limitations, parenting styles, and safety issues, among other factors.¹⁹ Research shows very consistent results. For example, in North Carolina, the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch was negatively associated with the number of extracurricular activities available at their high schools, particularly academic honors societies, service opportunities, and sports activities.²⁰ In a recent study of extracurricular activities included in the Common Application, the activities and descriptions were highly linked to socioeconomic status (SES), with white, Asian American, high-SES, and private school students reporting substantially more activities, more activities with top-level leadership roles, and more activities with distinctive honors and awards.²¹

It is not uncommon for families of high-achieving students to be unaware of the importance of extracurricular activities, or even to discourage them as a distraction from academic endeavors. Yet, in a holistic review, an applicant with a high GPA, high test scores, and academic rigor is likely to be deemed "qualified, but not admitted" without substantial evidence of leadership in extracurricular activities. In light of this, it is crucial for admissions officers to read extracurricular activities with the same critical, contextual lens that they use for academic credentials and achievements. Reviewing extracurricular activities holistically means assessing the opportunities an applicant has had to participate in high school and neighborhood activities, looking carefully at barriers to participation, such as an after-school job or having to care for family members, and valuing that work and service, which often is vital to sustaining low-income families and communities.



Policy Recommendations

Shaping a more equitable and just higher education system requires ensuring a fair and equitable assessment of college applicants through holistic review. To implement a strong, holistic review of admissions, institutions should:

- ✓ Review applicants for admission with a thoughtful understanding of their experiences and with robust data to provide context.
- ✓ Strengthen annual training and norming practices for admissions professionals to ensure consistent and reliable fidelity to holistic review practices and policies.
- ✓ Collect high quality data to understand the context of an applicant's high school and neighborhood, adopting tools like *Landscape* to support these efforts. More importantly, admission professionals must strengthen their ability to collect and have the capacity to use good data to provide better insight into their applicants.
- ✓ Incorporate the successful elements of holistic review, such as those used by the UC, and identify opportunities for appropriate, augmented review of applications from students who face compound disadvantages.
- ✓ If extracurricular and athletic preferences are producing inequitable access to higher education, take a more holistic approach so that low-income students are rewarded for activities and responsibilities that include after-school jobs and caregiving for siblings or other family members.

Campus holistic review in admissions efforts should be enacted alongside a review of inequitable practices that are prominent at many institutions, including legacy admissions, demonstrated interest, early admission policies, merit aid, and reliance on standardized tests. Some of these practices are also covered in other briefs as part of this series and include [“Ensuring Fairness in College Admissions”](#) and [“Advancing Equity by Rethinking the Use of Tests in College Admissions.”](#)

Along with enacting strong holistic review practices, institutions should:

END DEMONSTRATED INTEREST AND LEGACY POLICIES

In addition to academic factors, some admissions officers also consider forms of demonstrated interest, which is the degree to which an applicant connects with the institution and expresses likelihood of accepting an offer of admission. Currently 40% of admissions offices at selective colleges identify demonstrated interest as considerably or moderately important in their admissions process, an increase from seven percent in 2003.²² We do not have high quality data on the broad aspects of demonstrated interest, but in one rigorous study of a medium-sized private institution, multiple forms of demonstrated interest increased an applicant's probability of admission by more than 20%.²³ Needless to say, low-income and racially minoritized students are less likely to be aware that demonstrated interest is a factor in admissions, or to have the resources to express this interest, particularly if it requires travel to faraway campuses.

Legacy status is perhaps the most notable aspect of demonstrated interest. In the media, it is often portrayed by admissions officers as of marginal importance. However, Hurwitz, examining a broad range of highly selective colleges, found that legacy applicants were more than three times more likely to be admitted, even when such status was conditional upon the applicant satisfying all academic requirements.²⁴ At the most selective colleges, legacy applicants were more than five times more likely to be admitted. A primary legacy applicant at these schools — someone whose father or mother attended the school as an undergraduate — was nearly 15 times more likely to be admitted. Due to the history of elite universities, legacy applicants are undoubtedly whiter and wealthier than their non-legacy counterparts.²⁵ Although a relatively small number of admitted students have legacy status, the impact of removing such a policy is about more than numbers — it is about a university's values and commitment to its mission.

In a period when other forms of equity-promoting preferences are being removed, such as race-conscious admissions, ending the use of both legacy status and demonstrated interest should be relatively easy wins for admissions offices. Legacy admits significantly underperform their peers academically.²⁶ While use of legacy status and demonstrated interest policies have some benefits for improving yield, there is no evidence that they are essential for building or maintaining alumni or donor relations. In recent years, both Amherst and Johns Hopkins have eliminated legacy preferences with no documented negative effects on donation or alumni relations, and this has been supported by broader descriptive research.²⁷

RECONSIDER EARLY ACTION AND EARLY DECISION ADMISSIONS

Early action and early decision programs are popular with colleges because they help to increase enrollment rates and improve the academic profile of the student body. However, these programs also have a negative impact on disadvantaged applicants. Early admissions is essentially a form of demonstrated interest, because submitting an early application signals to a school that the applicant has designated it as their first choice. Enrollment models demonstrate that early admissions candidates are far more likely to choose to enroll, are generally stronger academically, and need less financial aid than regular admissions candidates.

A low-income applicant who wants to see multiple financial aid awards before making a decision is less likely to submit an early application. Yet, an early decision application is correlated with a 20-to-30-point increase in the probability of admission.²⁸ Unsurprisingly, despite the negative effects of these programs on low-income applicants, attempts to eliminate them in the 2000s were generally unsuccessful.

There are several reasons why early admissions programs are so difficult to eliminate. Colleges are reluctant to give up the increased enrollment and academic prestige that these programs provide, and many students and parents prefer early admissions programs because they offer a sense of security and certainty. Early admissions students are generally wealthier (and whiter) than students in the general applicant pool, leading to increased revenue for the school. These students also are far more likely to enroll, generating increased certainty for institutions, as well.

For many highly selective colleges, a very large proportion of the applicant pool is selected by early action or early admissions policies, leaving little room in the regular pool for students who are uncomfortable committing early to a campus or who lack access to high quality college counseling.²⁹ Many members of the general public, and even college counselors, are unaware that early admissions applicants make up such a large proportion of the applicant pool, or that these applicants are far more likely to be admitted if they apply early.

Institutions need to examine the equity implications of their early admissions practices. While institutions are unlikely to unwind early admissions entirely, they can eliminate early action programs that require students to enroll if they are accepted. They can also reduce the proportion of the applicant pool that is accepted early, leaving more room for those in the general pool of applicants to be admitted, as well as reduce the disparity in admissions probability between early and regular candidates. Highly selective colleges have the resources to bear the costs associated with this shift and will benefit by increasing the probability of enrollment for low-income and minoritized students who are more likely to apply through the regular decision process.

ANALYZE RESULTS OF TEST-OPTIONAL AND TEST-FREE POLICIES

The COVID-19 pandemic caused many disruptions to higher education, including the closure of testing centers and concerns about students' health when taking standardized tests in person. As a result, many institutions adopted test-optional or test-free policies, where SAT and ACT scores became either optional or not used in the selection process.

Even before the pandemic, there was a growing movement toward test-optional admissions, due to well-documented disparities in SAT and ACT scores across racial and socioeconomic groups and the comparative lack of the tests' predictive power compared to high school grades.³⁰ For many institutions, the introduction of test-optional policies was intended to attract larger and more racially diverse applicant pools. However, the impact of test-optional policies on admissions and enrollment outcomes remains unclear. The most robust current research suggests that such policies result in only modest gains, if any, on campus racial and socioeconomic diversity.³¹ Furthermore, it remains unclear how test-optional institutions evaluate candidates with test scores and how test-optional institutions evaluate applicants without this piece of information.

Another key issue is how institutions allocate financial aid, particularly merit-based scholarships. Standardized test scores have been a key criterion for state- and institutional-level merit-based scholarship programs. Many state-funded scholarships, such as Tennessee's HOPE Scholarship, Georgia's Zell Miller Scholarship, and the Florida Bright Futures Scholarship, have ACT or SAT thresholds that students must meet to be eligible. And many institutions continue to rely on standardized tests to make merit award decisions, even in test-optional admissions contexts. In a recent survey of more than 250 academic and enrollment leaders, 94% of whom represented test-optional or test-free institutions, nearly 40% of respondents from four-year public institutions indicated that test scores were required for at least some scholarships.³² As a result, test-optional and test-free policies exist in name only, as students in these states, and other students who apply to these institutions, must submit test scores for reasons other than admissions, even when test-optional and test-free policies are widely adopted or promoted by institutions.

This rapid acceleration of the test-optional movement allows institutions and researchers the opportunity to examine the consequences of implementing test-optional and test-free policies on a mass scale. The effects of the widespread adoption of test-optional policies on campus diversity remain unknown, and institutions can and should be engaging in critical reflection and institutional research on their policies and practices with respect to standardized tests and their effects on campus diversity. These policies include both admissions *and* financial aid practices that perpetuate inequities and constitute barriers that can be dismantled.

To effectively address the impacts of the U.S. Supreme Court decision, leaders and policymakers need to look at practices across the whole enrollment pipeline, beyond those discussed in this brief.³³ Campus leaders must critically examine the myriad other enrollment management policies and practices that have major impacts on access for minoritized students, covered in [“Ensuring Fairness in College Admissions,”](#) [“Advancing Equity by Rethinking the Use of Tests in College Admissions,”](#) and forthcoming briefs in this series. Recent research on recruitment practices has demonstrated widely disparate approaches among selective colleges that are racially discriminatory and equivalent to “recruitment redlining.”³⁴ Policies among public universities to increase the proportion of out-of-state students — and the associated tuition revenue that comes with them — have documented the negative effects on racialized minorities at those institutions.³⁵





Conclusion

While the Supreme Court's ruling in the *SFFA* cases will inevitably have major implications for Latinx, Black, Asian American, NHPI, and AIAN students at our most selective colleges — and for their salaries, career opportunities, and communities — there are significant measures that colleges, enrollment leaders, and admissions offices can adopt to mitigate these impacts. Throughout the holistic review process, there are opportunities to use an equity lens to examine, by focusing on the mission and critical data-based examination of racial impacts, a range of policies and practices that can be reformed or abolished in seeking a more just and humane admissions process.

Now is the time for action among college leaders to examine practices that are essential to the fair and just implementation of holistic admissions. The mission of institutions of higher learning — and the importance of racial and socioeconomic equity in our society — demand nothing less.

To learn more about holistic review, please visit the Michigan Admissions Collaboratory at

<https://sites.soe.umich.edu/mac/>.

Endnotes

- 1 Bastedo, M. N., Bowman, N. A., Glasener, K. M., & Kelly, J. L. (2018). What are we talking about when we talk about holistic review? Selective college admissions and its effects on low-SES students. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 89(5), 782-805.
- 2 Bastedo et al., 2018
- 3 Bleemer, Zachary. (2023). Affirmative action and its race-neutral alternatives. (EdWorkingPaper: 23-720). Retrieved from Annenberg Institute at Brown University.
- 4 Posselt, J. R., Jaquette, O., Bielby, R., & Bastedo, M. N. (2012). Access without equity: Longitudinal analyses of institutional stratification by race and ethnicity, 1972–2004. *American Educational Research Journal*, 49(6), 1074-1111.
- 5 Bastedo, M. N., & Jaquette, O. (2011). Running in place: Low-income students and the dynamics of higher education stratification. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 33(3), 318-339.
- 6 Chetty, R., Friedman, J. N., Saez, E., Turner, N., & Yagan, D. (2020). Income segregation and intergenerational mobility across colleges in the United States. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 135(3), 1567-1633.
- 7 Antonovics, K., & Backes, B. (2013). Were minority students discouraged from applying to University of California campuses after the affirmative action ban? *Education Finance and Policy*, 8(2), 208-250; Contreras, F. E. (2005). The reconstruction of merit post-Proposition 209. *Educational Policy*, 19(2), 371-395; Garces, L. M. (2013). Understanding the impact of affirmative action bans in different graduate fields of study. *American Educational Research Journal*, 50(2), 251-284; Garces, L. M., & Mickey-Pabello, D. (2015). Racial diversity in the medical profession: The impact of affirmative action bans on underrepresented student of color matriculation in medical schools. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 86(2), 264-294.
- 8 Poon, O., Lee, D. H., Galvez, E., Song Engler, J., Sérrano, B., Raza, A., Hurtado, J.M., & Chun, N. K. (2023). A Möbius model of racialized organizations: Durability of racial inequalities in admissions. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 1-26, doi:10.1080/00221546.2023.2203630.
- 9 Baker, D. J., & Bastedo, M. N. (2022). What if we leave it up to chance? Admissions lotteries and equitable access at selective colleges. *Educational Researcher*, 51(2), 134-145.
- 10 Nicola, T. P. (2022). Assessing applicants in context? School profiles and their implications for equity in the selective college admission process. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 15(6), 700-715.
- 11 Bastedo, M. N., & Bowman, N. A. (2017). Improving admission of low-SES students at selective colleges: Results from an experimental simulation. *Educational Researcher*, 46(2), 67-77; Bastedo et al., 2018.
- 12 Gaertner, M. N., & Hart, M. (2013). Considering class: College access and diversity. *Harvard Law & Policy Review*, 7, 367-403.
- 13 Bleemer, Zachary. (2023). Affirmative action and its race-neutral alternatives. (EdWorkingPaper: 23-720). Retrieved from Annenberg Institute at Brown University.
- 14 Rothstein Study
- 15 Bastedo, M. N., Bell, D. W., Howell, J. S., Hsu, J., Hurwitz, M., Perfetto, G., & Welch, M. (2022). Admitting students in context: Field experiments on information dashboards in college admissions. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 93(3), 327-374.
- 16 Mabel, Z., Hurwitz, M. D., Howell, J., & Perfetto, G. (2022). Can standardizing applicant high school and neighborhood information help to diversify selective colleges? *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 44(3), 505-531.
- 17 Espenshade, T. J., Chung, C. Y., & Walling, J. L. (2004). Admission preferences for minority students, athletes, and legacies at elite universities. *Social Science Quarterly*, 85(5), 1422-1446.
- 18 Arcidiacono, P., Kinsler, J., & Ransom, T. (2022). Legacy and athlete preferences at Harvard. *Journal of Labor Economics*, 40(1), 133-156.
- 19 Jayakumar, U. M., & Page, S. E. (2021). Cultural capital and opportunities for exceptionalism: Bias in university admissions. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 92(7), 1109-1139; Jayakumar, U.M., Kidder, W.C., Comeaux, E., & Thaxton, S. (2023). Race and privilege misunderstood: Athletics and selective college admissions in (and beyond) the Supreme Court affirmative action cases. *UCLA Law Review*.

- 20 Bennett, P. R., Lutz, A. C., & Jayaram, L. (2012). Beyond the schoolyard: The role of parenting logics, financial resources, and social institutions in the social class gap in structured activity participation. *Sociology of Education*, 85(2), 131-157.
- 21 Park, J. J., Kim, B. H., Wong, N., Zheng, J., Breen, S., Lo, P., Rosinger, K., Baker, D., Nguyen, M. & Poon, O. (2023). Inequality beyond standardized tests: Trends in extracurricular activity reporting in college applications across race and class (EdWorkingPaper: 23-749). Retrieved from Annenberg Institute at Brown University.
- 22 (Clinedinst, 2019)
- 23 Dearden, J. A., Li, S., Meyerhoefer, C. D., & Yang, M. (2017). Demonstrated interest: Signaling behavior in college admissions. *Contemporary Economic Policy*, 35(4), 630-657.
- 24 Hurwitz, M. (2011). The impact of legacy status on undergraduate admissions at elite colleges and universities. *Economics of Education Review*, 30(3), 480-492.
- 25 Arcidiacono et al., 2022; Castilla, E. J., & Poskanzer, E. J. (2022). Through the front door: Why do organizations (still) prefer legacy applicants? *American Sociological Review*, 87(5), 782-826.
- 26 Martin & Spenner, 2008; Massey, D. S., & Mooney, M. (2007). The effects of America's three affirmative action programs on academic performance. *Social Problems*, 54(1), 99-117.
- 27 Coffman, C., O'Neil, T., & Starr, B. (2010). An empirical analysis of the impact of legacy preferences on alumni giving at top universities. In R. Kahlenberg (Ed.), *Affirmative Action for the Rich: Legacy Preferences in College Admissions*, pp. 101-121. Century Foundation Press.
- 28 Avery, C., & Levin, J. (2010). Early admissions at selective colleges. *American Economic Review*, 100(5), 2125-2156.
- 29 Park, J. J., & Eagan, M. K. (2011). Who goes early? A multi-level analysis of enrolling via early action and early decision admissions. *Teachers College Record*, 113(11), 2345-2373.
- 30 Furuta, J. (2017). Rationalization and student/school personhood in U.S. college admissions: The rise of test-optional policies, 1987 to 2015. *Sociology of Education*, 90(3), 236–254.
- 31 Belasco, A. S., Rosinger, K. O., & Hearn, J. C. (2015). The test-optional movement at America's selective liberal arts colleges: A boon for equity or something else? *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 37(2), 206–223; Bennett, 2021).
- 32 Maguire Associates (2021). *The future of test-optional*. Concord, MA: Author.
- 33 Coleman, A. L., Keith, J. L., & Webb, E. L. (2019). *The playbook: Understanding the role of race neutral strategies in advancing higher education diversity goals*. Washington, DC: College Board and Education Counsel.
- 34 Salazar, K. G., Jaquette, O., & Han, C. (2021). Coming soon to a neighborhood near you? Off-campus recruiting by public research universities. *American Educational Research Journal*, 58(6), 1270-131; Salazar, K. G. (2022). Recruitment redlining by public research universities in the Los Angeles and Dallas metropolitan areas. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 93(4), 585-621.
- 35 Jaquette, O., Curs, B. R., & Posselt, J. R. (2016). Tuition rich, mission poor: Nonresident enrollment growth and the socioeconomic and racial composition of public research universities. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 87(5), 635-673.

Acknowledgements

This brief was authored by [Michael Bastedo](#), associate dean of research and graduate studies and professor at the University of Michigan Marsal Family School of Education. The Campaign for College Opportunity and the author thank Yvonne Berumen, Zach Bleemer, Alison De Lucca, and Michal Kurlaender for their review and thoughtful feedback on this paper. The author thanks Reuben Kapp and Yiping Bai for their research assistance. We are grateful to the funders who are supporting this series of briefs, including The Lumina Foundation, The Stuart Foundation, The College Futures Foundation, The Kresge Foundation, The W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Eileen and Harold Brown, The Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund, and Great Public Schools Now.



Please visit our website for more resources to affirm equity, ensure inclusion, and empower action.
www.collegecampaign.org

 facebook.com/collegecampaign

  @CollegeOpp

LOS ANGELES OFFICE

1149 S. Hill Street, Ste. 925
Los Angeles, CA 90015
Tel: (213) 744-9434
Fax: (877) 207-3560

SACRAMENTO OFFICE

1512 14th Street
Sacramento, CA 95814
Tel: (916) 443-1681
Fax: (916) 443-1682

WASHINGTON, D.C. OFFICE

1016 16th Street NW, Suite 100
Washington, D.C. 20036
Tel: (202) 293-2828

Thomas A. Saenz, Chair
Edward C. Bush, Vice Chair
Maria Anguiano, Treasurer
J. Luke Wood, Secretary

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Brooke Armour
Estela Mara Bensimon
Lena Carew
Mellissa E. Gallegos
Paul Granillo

Juan Sanchez Muñoz
Maria Ott
Julie Peller
Reshma Shamasunder
Joseph Villela