Recommendations for BOARS on Strengthening Equity in Freshman and Transfer Admissions
June 5, 2020

Thank you for inviting me to share my thoughts with you today. As you already know, for the past 16 years I’ve led the Campaign for College Opportunity with a focus on expanding college access and success in California and with an unabashed focus on closing equity gaps that persist in student preparation for college, admission into college, and success through college. As a native Californian, a first generation Latina college graduate, a UCLA alum, and a proud product of affirmative action . . . our organizational mission isn’t something I just do, it’s a purpose and avocation that allows me every single day to address the equal parts guilt and pride I feel for having made it.

I also want to be clear that you shouldn’t diminish or devalue this passion – it comes backed with facts, experience, and an abundance of political strategy to press for change in higher education (including the UC) that could and should be more diverse and inclusive, and yet is not sufficiently so.

I appreciate the invitation to discuss how the BOARS can advance a more equitable admissions process for both freshman and transfer applicants. It is the right question to be asking and answering, especially as we reflect on the historic decision by the UC Board of Regents just two weeks ago on standardized testing.

I know the challenge before every campus in identifying a fair admissions process is a paramount goal. But in practice, admissions practices have disparate impact. Admissions processes identify what a campus values – and places those values in unequal weight to achieve some aspired and hopeful (but impossible) place of objectivity.

As you consider how to make admissions more equitable, I urge you to ask the harder questions:

- Who is at the table deciding what our admissions process is?
- How does each part of our admissions process benefit or hurt certain Californians by race/ethnicity, gender, economic status? Be specific, and ask how does our admissions process benefit or hurt Black students? Latinx students? Hmong students? Filipino students? STOP USING and lumping all students in a broad UNDERREPRESENTED category.
- What other characteristics and values that students bring with them are we leaving out altogether? Is our admissions process centered on whiteness?

Let me be clear. I know we have a real capacity and funding challenge in our state, we simply are not keeping up with the number of eligible students the UC could serve if fully funded to meet the demand. I am also aware that many in the UC are not interested in expanding and meeting broader demand. Some in the UC thrive off the number of rejections as if admittance to an elite club that few belong to is somehow an adequate measure of quality. And I don’t doubt many worry that rapid growth and expansion would indeed threaten quality. But since the state will not likely be doubling your enrollment capacity, that conversation can be left for another day.

The reality as I see it is you continue to have more eligible students than you can admit. You have various admissions and holistic review processes at every single campus. And with the exception of UC Merced none of your campuses reflect the population diversity of California. Not in the student body at 8 of 9 UC campuses and definitely not in the faculty or leadership bodies at ANY of the 9 UC campuses.
I’m making this presentation on the heels of national unrest and uproar over the depths of racism in our nation and the anti-Black racism that is fueling the disregard for Black Lives, especially by Police, but not solely by Police.

Perhaps the table was set to drop standardized tests by the Covid-19 health pandemic, but let me be clear, the movement for racial equity across our state and nation will continue to fuel those of us committed to eliminating policies and practices that continue to have disparate impact on Black, Latinx, Asian American sub groups, and Native Americans.

You asked for my specific thoughts on admissions and here are my recommendations.

**BOARS SHOULD:**

1. PROVIDE CLEAR GUIDELINES TO ALL CAMPUSES ON THE NEWLY ADOPTED TEST OPTIONAL POLICY. Specifically, direct UC campuses to admit students without the use of the test to ensure test optional admissions do not produce disparate results based on race/ethnicity, or socioeconomic status.
   a. First, admit students without consideration of the test. Then run admissions again with the test to assess if some students were missed who you might want to admit.
   b. Pay attention to who is submitting test scores. Look at the distribution of test takers. Are they advantaged by race/ethnicity, income, high school? This can tell you how much weight to place on any students you might consider admitting for the second pass at admissions in which you use the test.
   c. Remember that students who took the last-in person test in March 2020 are likely advantaged – it was an early sitting for juniors.

2. RESPOND THOUGHTFULLY TO THE IMPACT OF COVID-19. Direct UC campuses to factor in COVID-19 consequences in admissions
   a. Recognize that a quarter of Californians live with a person out of work due to the pandemic. The loss of income may impact student performance in courses this upcoming Fall and participation in extracurricular activities and will be particularly acute for students who were already low-income, students of color.
   b. Be rigorous in analyzing how the number and content of applications from high schools have changed this year as compared to previous years. The move to online education has led to uneven instruction, a lack of college preparatory guidance, and opportunity across the state. Many students could not access courses or activities to make their applications more competitive. Instructional quality is impacting grades. All of this is no fault of students and should be factored into admissions decisions.

3. REQUIRE INDEPTH IMPLICIT BIAS TRAINING FOR EVERYONE INVOLVED IN ADMISSIONS, INCLUDING READERS.
   a. Require and invest in strong training.
   b. Require reflective representation amongst staff, volunteers, and all others involved in the admissions process.

4. COMMUNICATE CLEARLY WITH STUDENTS AND COUNSELORS. Direct UC campuses to communicate clearly with students and families that you will not rely on tests to make admissions decisions. Communicate exactly how the test will be used.
a. Students and their families are concerned that if they do not take the test they will be harmed in admissions. **UC must clarify that the test will not advantage any student in admissions as this, after all, was the intent of the Board of Regents.**
b. Remember that students who believe they would have scored low on the SAT/ACT or did score low often choose not to apply to UC. Do not shut out these students and instead communicate that the test will not have weight.

5. **REQUIRE ALL CAMPUSES TO PARTICIPATE IN THE ELC. IT IS ABOUT TIME THAT ELC ACTUALLY MEANT SOMETHING BEYOND UC MERCED.** Move from Eligibility in the Local Context to an Admission Guarantee and consider a geographic guarantee or preference.
   a. At minimum, the top 4% of graduates at every high school in CA should be guaranteed admission to a UC campus of their choice. All campuses must be required to participate.
   b. **Students from California should be designated as “local” to the UC closest in proximity to them and be guaranteed or given preference for a spot if they are in the top 9% of their high school graduating class.**
   c. ELC only defines eligible students and is not a guarantee of admission. Today, only UC Merced accepts all ELC students and most do not accept the admission offer. Most students in the ELC pool today (top 9% of high school graduating class) are not admitted to their campus of choice rendering ELC ineffective as a tool for diversifying campuses.
   d. When ELC was at 4%, more UC campuses (with the exception of UCLA and UC Berkeley) were admitting larger pool of students from the top 4% and diversity was higher.

6. **SUPPORT EFFORTS TO IMPROVE A-G PREPARATION IN HIGH SCHOOLS.** Align high school graduation requirements with admission requirements at UC as an outcome of the feasibility study of a new admission test.
   a. Misalignment keeps far too many Black, Latinx students from qualifying for admission. Only 35% of Black students completed a-g and 39% of Latinx students in 2017.
   b. Post-alignment, require the agreed upon curriculum as a condition of high school graduation so that all high school graduates are eligible to apply to the UC.

You also asked me to speak on more equitable transfer admissions.

As you know, the Campaign has always championed a clearer path to transfer for community colleges. In 2010, we sponsored and secured legislation that created the Associate Degree for Transfer (ADT) that provided clarity on the transfer path, an Associate of Arts degree, and guaranteed admission with junior standing to the CSU. We were glad when the UC aligned pathways for ADT earners a few years ago. We also know we have a long, long way to go to fix the broken path to transfer that many community college students face.

On transfer, here are my specific recommendations:

1. **Improve alignment of UC transfer requirements with the Associate Degree for Transfer and provide guaranteed admission to ADT earners** into the University of California with a preference for students who are “local.” The UC guarantee could come with a higher GPA threshold than what is expected for a CSU admit.
   a. UC still has its 21 pathways which clarifies the path, but has no guarantee.
b. UC introduced Pathways Plus, which encourages students to get on one of the 21 Transfer Pathways and then select one of the six undergraduate campuses that have TAG agreements (UCLA, Cal and UCSD do not have TAG agreements). Assuming requirements are met, you will be guaranteed a spot at your TAG campus.

c. There is still no guarantee for ADT earners to the UC; no incentive to complete an associate degree. Some campuses have committed to considering the ADT in comprehensive review.

d. UC has gotten better about listing out the differences in the Transfer Pathways and ADT for specific majors. Do more of that.

2. Expand spots for ADT earners at the UC since more students are transferring, and because of COVID-19, more are likely to choose a community college to begin their college journey.
   a. The number of students transferring to the University of California and California State University rose to 87,170 - a six percent increase from two years ago.
   b. The number of students earning an Associate Degree for Transfer (ADT) increased by more than 40 percent since 2017.

3. Consider options for students admitted in 2021 and 2022 to defer admission for one year while completing credits at the CA Community Colleges.
   a. COVID-19 has presented a unique set of challenges for students. Many students are electing to enroll in a community college instead of a four-year university because family finances have changed, they need to stay closer to home, or they are uncertain about their ability to succeed in an online learning environment because of technology or a need for student supports.

4. Support outreach and partnerships between UC campuses and community college campuses, especially those that do not historically send enough students to the UC.
   a. We know budget cuts will have dire consequences; prioritize efforts like these that support strong transfer pathways.
   b. First generation and low-income students need the guidance from these efforts; they need the sense of welcoming and belonging these programs provide, even to apply to the UC.

Finally, as you consider these recommendations, I will close by asking you to do something even harder.

LOOK IN THE MIRROR AND WORK TO ENSURE THAT THE BOARS REFLECTS THE DIVERSITY OF OUR STATE. Increase the racial/ethnic diversity of BOARS.

a. Today your body is 69% White. You lack a single woman of color in a state where most women are women of color. You have one Latin American representative on BOARS in a state where the largest ethnic group is Latinx and the majority of K-12 students are, too.

b. Instead of listing all the reasons your body is not more diverse, find proactive solutions to engaging colleagues that are too often LEFT OUT from the possibility of leading and serving on this body. Recognize that many faculty of color carry the unpaid burden (and all would say benefit) of mentoring and guiding students of color who seek them out for support. A talent and benefit that they provide which often has little or no value on the path to tenure or in getting their research published. Yet it is lifechanging, and it is exactly why students of color succeed or don’t on your campuses. I have yet to meet a student of color who does not immediately name that one
faculty of color who took her under his wings and often had more faith in her success than she did. For me, that UCLA faculty leader was Dr. Leo Estrada.

In admissions, sometimes we devise processes that are simple - indeed we have limited resources and capacity. But in some places, simpler and cheaper is not acceptable. Simpler and cheaper can result in weighing parts of the admissions process in ways that benefit some groups over others. We can be lulled into complacency because we can justify that the process has been vetted and has a semblance of objectivity, but in fact, we are always making choices about what we value.

Many of the arguments in support of standardized testing were centered around ensuring that students are college-ready, that they will succeed in the UC, that they will be up for the high quality and rigor that the UC is world-renowned for. Admissions processes that focus only on defining who is college-ready through a false screen of objectivity fail to recognize the reality of research that has demonstrated that, in fact, students in a much broader range of eligibility can and do succeed. They succeed because the UC has amazing faculty and supports. They succeed because they are surrounded by other amazing California students. And they also succeed when they are in an environment surrounded by peers who look like them and faculty who reflect their experiences. I do not doubt the UC plays a role in that success, no matter if that admitted student is right at the cusp of an arbitrary cut off for admissions or far from it.

It is always easier to devise processes that are simple, indeed we have limited resources and capacity. But is not better. It is not more equitable. It is not more inclusive, unless we make it clear that our processes must be each of those things.

I hope you will consider making these values of equity a part of your new admissions considerations. And not only at UC Merced, but at every single one of the UC campuses.

Thank you.

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