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ASSOCIATION OF INDEPENDENT CALIFORNIA COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

ANNUAL REPORT ON ADMISSIONS PRACTICES

This report to the California State Legislature and Department of Finance, submitted on behalf of independent, nonprofit higher education institutions by the Association of Independent California Colleges and Universities, provides a statutorily mandated admissions report per California Education Code Section 66018.5.

The Association of Independent California Colleges and Universities

Independent California Colleges and Universities are recognized in the state's Master Plan for Higher Education as an important provider and partner with the public sector and the state in the preparation of future leaders and the state's workforce. Independent colleges and universities are defined in California Education Code 66010 (b): As used in this part, "independent institutions of higher education" are those nonpublic higher education institutions that grant undergraduate degrees, graduate degrees, or both, and that are formed as nonprofit corporations in this state and are accredited by an agency recognized by the United States Department of Education.

The following report details the findings.

INTRODUCTION

The decision to attend higher education, and the application process, is often times a tremendous yet stressful experience for both students and their families. The member institutions of the Association of Independent California Colleges and Universities (AICCU) understand the need to make policies and practices more transparent. We are committed to serving students of all backgrounds and work diligently to build student bodies that reflect the diversity of our state. The sector is committed to admissions and recruiting policies that are grounded in a commitment to integrity and ethical conduct.

The 2019 “Operation Varsity Blues” investigation by the U.S. Department of Justice exposed alarming criminal behaviors undertaken by affluent families to secure favorable admission decisions in exchange for financial payments to individuals. As AICCU indicated at the time, these actions were illegal activities committed by individuals at institutions, not by the institutions themselves, and did not and do not reflect the mission, vision, or values of our member institutions. Following the revelations outlined in the investigation, member institutions conducted reviews of their internal policies and oversight of special admits and implemented changes to prevent abuse of their processes in the future.

Independent, nonprofit institutions evaluate students holistically, a strategy that allows for the assessment of an applicant’s unique experiences in life, in addition to traditional measures of test scores and grades. The process takes into account a wide range of considerations that are academic and extracurricular, as well as personal statements and letters of recommendation. Because there is no one way to conduct a holistic review, the exact method varies slightly from institution to institution, in recognition of their independent status and unique missions. Independent, nonprofit colleges and universities often create incoming class profiles, which include data such as median ACT or SAT scores, GPA, proportion of students from in or out of state, etc. However, these are not “minimum” qualifications to be eligible for admission.

Institutions retain the flexibility to assess a wide array of factors that, taken together, help them offer admissions to applicants. For example, an institution may consider whether the applicant is familiar with the institution through a relationship with an alumnus or if their sibling is currently enrolled (these are often referred to as “legacy” students). Institutions may also notate applicants who are the children of faculty or staff, athletic recruits, those applying to music or theater programs, or ROTC candidates, among others. Additionally, an institution can choose to give consideration to applicants from socioeconomically disadvantaged or underrepresented backgrounds as part of their commitment to diversify their student body or a specific academic program. Others give additional consideration to applicants from the local service region who enter the university through Promise programs or local articulation agreements.

In short, holistic admissions allows independent, nonprofit institutions to consider a host of factors to help weigh applicants in a manner to build classes that reflect institutional goals, including the diversity of their student bodies.

The following is *AICCU’s Annual Report on Admission Practices*.

DATA COLLECTION

AICCU created a reporting survey for institutions to submit information on the institutional admissions policies pertaining to applicants with relationships to alumni or donors. This information was collected per Education Code Section 66018.5, which was codified last year in [AB 697](#) (Ting). The survey was sent to all 85 AICCU institutions in April 2020. Follow-up was conducted with institutions urging completion of the survey throughout April and May 2020.

Of the 85 member institutions, seven are graduate-only institutions that are not covered by the requirements of the Education Code section. Additionally, two institutions have indicated they will submit individual reports to the Legislature and are not included in the findings of this report. This report includes the responses of 75 total institutions.

FINDINGS

AICCU found that the overwhelming majority of member institutions do not provide any manner of preferential treatment in admissions on the basis of applicant relationships to donors or alumni of the institution. Of the 75 institutions that responded, 71 (94.7% of respondents) reported that they do not have policies that meet the description outlined in Education Code Section 66018.5(b). Only four (or 5.3% of respondents) answered “yes” to having any type of admission policies that they believe meet the description contained in the Education Code. The full list of institutions is included in the appendix.

The four responding institutions that responded affirmatively are Claremont McKenna College, Pitzer College, Santa Clara University, and Vanguard University of Southern California. These institutions reported that, while they notate applicants with relationships to donors or alumni of the institution, they do not admit those applicants using different admission standards than those that apply to all applicants. Applicants are not evaluated on less stringent admission criteria; they are still assessed for their individual merit, using the holistic admissions review of the institutions.

CONCLUSION

As demonstrated in the responses, independent, nonprofit institutions overwhelmingly do not provide any manner of preferential treatment in admissions processes for applicants with relationships to alumni or donors. For the small number that responded affirmatively, the practices largely appear to include notating applicants for an array of reasons that may include, but not be limited to, those outlined in the statute. This may prompt additional review of the application, but largely does not appear to indicate that those applicants are evaluated on less stringent admission criteria.

Independent, nonprofit institutions have and continue to utilize holistic admissions review to account for a wide array of factors that are academic, personal, and extracurricular. It is a complex process that helps institutions build diverse student classes. In a study published in the *Economics of Education Review*, Hurwitz (2010) accurately depicted the complexity of this process, stating:

The holistic admissions approach taken by these institutions means that it is impossible to create a rank-order of applications based on a composite of academic and non-academic characteristics ... absence of a concrete

admissions formula makes the interpretation of anecdotes particularly tricky, as characteristics unavailable to the researcher but available to the admissions officer (e.g. personal qualities, leadership potential) may propel an applicant from the waitlist pile to the accept pile, rather than her legacy, athlete, or minority status. Discussing the injustices of a non-egalitarian admissions system by pointing to specific cases is of limited value without access to the student's complete admissions package, including the teacher and guidance counselor recommendations, application essay, etc. For example, between two applicants, the seemingly more qualified candidate with the higher SAT score and high school grades may have been less engaged academically than the second applicant with lower quantifiable characteristics. These non-quantifiable attributes might have been conveyed through teacher recommendations, for instance. An outsider without access to the applicants' teacher recommendations might be surprised by the admissions outcomes of these two high school students, and might search through a string of observable characteristics (e.g. legacy, athlete, or minority status) to explain this perplexing scenario. However, the reality of college admissions is far more complex. Individual decisions can rarely be boiled down to one attribute, and attempting to identify the cause of an individual decision will generally yield spurious conclusions. (p. 482)

AICCU has completed this reporting requirement to provide policymakers and the public a clearer understanding of the admissions processes of its member institutions, as required by AB 697 (2019). AICCU is not a system office (such as found with the public segments); rather, it is the organizational voice for California's independent, nonprofit colleges and universities.

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Appendix

Responding Institutions That Do Not Have Policies Meeting the Requirements of Education Code Section 66018.5:

1. American Jewish University
2. Antioch University-Los Angeles
3. Art Center College of Design
4. Azusa Pacific University
5. Biola University
6. Brandman University
7. California Baptist University
8. California College of the Arts
9. California Institute of Integral Studies
10. California Institute of Technology
11. California Institute of the Arts
12. California Lutheran University
13. Chapman University
14. Charles R. Drew University of Medicine and Science
15. Columbia College Hollywood
16. Concordia University-Irvine
17. Dominican University of California
18. Fresno Pacific University
19. Golden Gate University
20. Harvey Mudd College
21. Holy Names University
22. Hope International University
23. Humphreys University
24. John Paul the Great Catholic University
25. La Sierra University
26. Laguna College of Art and Design
27. Life Pacific College
28. Loma Linda University
29. Los Angeles Pacific University
30. Loyola Marymount University
31. Marymount California University
32. Menlo College
33. Mills College
34. Mount Saint Mary's University of Los Angeles
35. National University
36. Notre Dame de Namur University
37. Occidental College
38. Otis College of Art and Design
39. Pacific Oaks College
40. Pacific Union College
41. Palo Alto University
42. Pepperdine University
43. Point Loma Nazarene University
44. Pomona College
45. Providence Christian College
46. Saint Mary's College of California
47. Samuel Merritt University
48. San Diego Christian College
49. San Francisco Art Institute
50. San Francisco Conservatory of Music
51. Scripps College
52. Simpson University
53. Soka University of America
54. Southern California Institute of Architecture
55. Southern California University of Health Sciences
56. The Chicago School of Professional Psychology at Los Angeles
57. The Master's University and Seminary
58. Thomas Aquinas College
59. Touro University Worldwide
60. University of La Verne
61. University of Redlands
62. University of Saint Katherine
63. University of San Diego
64. University of San Francisco
65. University of the Pacific
66. University of the West
67. Westmont College
68. Whittier College
69. William Jessup University
70. Woodbury University
71. Zaytuna College

Responding Institutions That Have Policies Meeting the Requirements of Education Code Section 66018.5:

Institution	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Claremont McKenna College	0	0	0	26	23	23
Pitzer College	0	0	0	74	50	45
Santa Clara University	0	0	0	1,223	362	343
Vanguard University	N is too small to report	N is too small to report	N is too small to report	140	86	79

Note: Student-level data reported with N of less than 10 is not reported. Numbers (1) through (6) correspond to EC Section 66018.5 subsection (c) pertaining to applicants.

Institutions That Did Not Reply to AICCU Survey:

- John F. Kennedy University

Institutions Indicating They Will Submit Their Own Report:

- Stanford University
- University of Southern California

Graduate-Only Member Institutions That Are Not Covered by Education Code Section 66018.5:

- Claremont Graduate University
- Fielding Graduate University
- International Technology University
- Keck Graduate Institute
- Saybrook University
- Western University of Health Sciences
- Touro University California