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Remediating Unequal Access: The Role of Outreach in Shaping College Opportunities for Underserved Students

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The discourse regarding affirmative action in California, stemming in recent years from the passing of SB 1 in 1995 and Proposition 209 in 1996, has major implications for African Americans' struggle for higher education in California. This legislation signals a need to understand where African Americans are now and how to identify strategies and practices that are efficacious in improving access as well as preparing these students for competitive college eligibility. In an attempt to illuminate the current status of African American students in California, this article analyzes patterns and trends of academic preparation at the secondary level and undergraduate enrollment to the University of California (UC) and California State University (CSU) systems. Intervention programs and policies and a range of strategies necessary to create a pipeline to college for students who are both disadvantaged and academically qualified are also discussed. Such efforts and continued research have become critically important due to recent reductions in outreach funding, which have forced California institutions to do more with fewer resources.

Opportunities to Learn

For several reasons, California -- and the UC system in particular -- serves as an instructive case study to understand how African Americans struggle for access to higher education. Over the years, African Americans and Latinos have been faced with an inadequate K-12 system or "opportunities to learn"¹ in California that has proven to be a major constraint to students' college access and eligibility. In this system disparities in access to advanced placement classes, honors courses, and other college preparatory services for urban communities are quite evident². For example, California children in urban schools study in overcrowded conditions, with student-teacher ratios as high as 40:1. One-quarter of urban school teachers in California report not having a textbook for every student, and access to computers is woeful³. Williams, et al. vs. State of California, et al. addressed the appalling conditions of many of its public schools. The plaintiffs argued that the State was failing to provide thousands of public school students, particularly those in low-income communities and communities of color, with the bare minimum necessities required for an education, such as textbooks, trained teachers, and safe and clean facilities. As a result of these educational inequalities, California has been

¹ See Oakes, J. (1990). *Multiplying inequalities: The effects of race, social class, and tracking on opportunities to learn mathematics and science*. Santa Monica, CA: The Rand Corporation.

² W.R. Allen, M. Bonous-Hammarath, and R. Teranishi, "Stony the Road We Trod: the Black Struggle for Higher Education in California," *CHOICES University of California, Los Angeles* (2002), D. Wilds & R. Wilson, *Sixteen Annual Status Report on Minorities in Higher Education*, (Washington: American Council on Education Press, 1998)

³ Tom Hayden

unsuccessful in increasing the admissions of the total population of students of color, particularly African Americans and Latinos.

California HS Students' Academic Preparation & Undergrad Enrollment

In 1996, when voters passed Proposition 209 (which outlawed the use of affirmative action in California public institutions) the situation became more dire. The measure barring affirmative action has resulted in a noticeable drop (24%) in college enrollments for African American students in the UC system between 1997 and 1998 although the number of African American applicants increased slightly. The most significant drop in enrollment that year was seen at UC Berkeley where African American freshman enrollment dropped by 51% although the total freshman enrollment increased by 5%.⁴ Since the dramatic drop in enrollment after Proposition 209, numbers have gone up slightly for African Americans, but still do not come close to pre-Proposition 209 enrollment data.

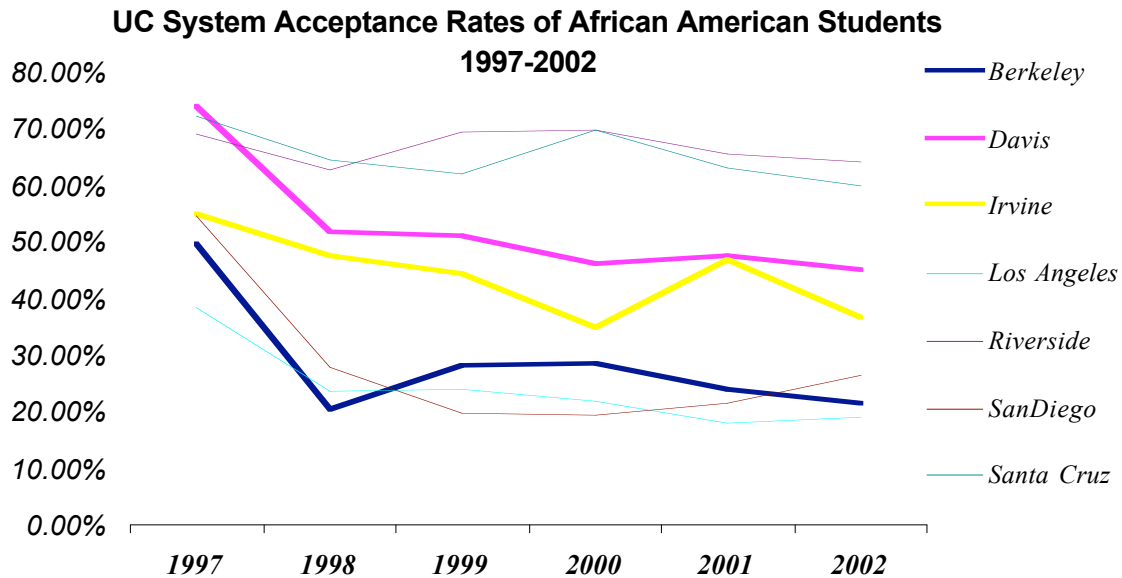
Moreover, the shifting demographics in California have led to the neglect of issues relating to admission, enrollment and matriculation rates among African American students. For example, contrary to public and policymakers' perceptions, Los Angeles County has the second largest population of African Americans among the nation's counties⁵ (about 930,000 people), and California has the second largest Black population among the states (about 2.3 million people). Yet, in 1999 only 3 percent of African American high school graduates were fully eligible for admission to the UC compared to 13 percent of Whites, 30 percent of Asians, and 4 percent of Latinos.⁶ During that same period, African American males and females represented 1.2 and 2.1 percent respectively of the UC undergraduate enrollment despite making up nearly 7 percent of the state's overall population. Between the years 1999 and 2000, African American applicants have seen a 47% increase in their rejection rate at three of the most competitive UC campuses -- Los Angeles, Berkeley, and San Diego, resulting in a decline in the acceptance rate from 46% in 1997 to 24% in 1999, as shown in the graph that follows⁷.

⁴ Undergraduate Admission Statistics. UC Berkeley Office of Student Research

⁵ Second only to Cook county, Illinois

⁶ Source: Stony the Road We Trod

⁷ Source: University of California Office of the President, Official Admission and Forecast Files (2002)



An examination of the college eligibility data sheds light on the scope of this problem. Table 1 shows African American 12th grade graduates who were UC and/or CSU eligible relative to other major racial/ethnic group in California. For example, although there are 19,327 Asian Americans graduates from California public high schools compared to 22,065 African Americans in 1997-98, Asian Americans produce a significantly higher number of UC and/or CSU eligible students (59.2% Asians vs. 27.8% African Americans). Similarly, 41 percent of White American 12th grade graduates complete all courses required for UC and or CSU in 1997-98. Whites outnumber African Americans in terms of UC and/or CSU eligible students, but African Americans produce a slightly higher number of UC and/or CSU eligible students than Chicanos/Latinos (27.8% African Americans vs. 23.8% Chicanos/Latinos). These data also indicate that in the future, there are no significant changes in the number of African Americans and other groups who are UC and/or CSU eligible. In 2001-02, African Americans represent 25.3 percent of UC and/or CSU eligible students, with Asians, Whites, and Chicanos/Latinos comprising 57.5 percent, 40.3 percent, and 21.8 percent, respectively. These data paint a disappointing picture with regard to the number of African Americans and Chicanos/Latinos entering the UC and CSUs.

Table 1

California Public Schools 12th Grade Graduates Completing all Courses Required for UC and/or CSU Entrance by Ethnicity (1997 – 2002)

	97'-98'		98'-99'		99' - 00'		00'-01'		01' - 02'	
Ethnicity	# of (Grads)	UC/CSU Eligible	# of (Grads)	UC/CSU Eligible	# of (Grads)	UC/CSU Eligible	# of (Grads)	UC/CSU Eligible	# of (Grads)	UC/CSU Eligible
American Indian	(2,513)	22.5%	(2,665)	22.3%	(2,655)	23.4%	(2,734)	23.1%	(3,036)	22.8%
African American	(21,165)	27.8%	(22,065)	26.3%	(22,536)	24.7%	(22,474)	26.1%	(23,451)	25.3%
Chicano/Latino	(87,742)	23.8%	(95,438)	22.1%	(100,637)	21.5%	(103,795)	22.9%	(109,038)	21.8%
Asian	(18,596)	59.4%	(19,327)	59.2%	(19,739)	57.9%	(34,677)	58.4%	(35,624)	57.5%
White	(128,405)	41%	(134,229)	40.6%	(137,578)	40.2%	(139,228)	40.6%	(140,421)	40.3%
Total	(282,897)		(299,221)		(309,866)		(316,124)		(325,895)	

Data Source: California Department of Education

Table 2 reveals applicant and admit figures for various racial/ethnic groups who attended the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) from 1997-2002. UCLA is an important case study since it is the most populated UC campus and among the highest tier of UC institutions which include Berkeley and Davis. African Americans in particular have experienced the most significant drop of high seniors admitted to UCLA. A year after the affirmative action ban, African Americans represented approximately 5 percent of students admitted, but had an even larger decline to 3.6 percent in 2002, despite the number African American applicants increasing over this span from 1,247 in 1998 to 1,757 in 2002. Over this same period, there was also a decline in the number admitted among Whites and Chicanos/Latinos, dropping from 33 percent in 1997 to 31.1 percent in 2002 and 15.3 percent in 1997 to 13.9 percent in 2002, respectively. Unlike African American admits, the total admits for Asians increased from 35.7 percent in 1997 to 38.3 percent in 2002. Thus although affirmative action policy changes may have significant affects on African American admits, we need to consider other factors such as the increase in Asian and White American admits.

Table 2
UCLA Applicants and Percent Admitted Freshmen by Ethnicity (Fall 1997-2002)

Ethnicity	97' (N) Admits	98' (N) Admits	99' (N) Admits	00' (N) Admits	01' (N) Admits	02' (N) admits
American Indian	(143) .8%	(178) .5%	(179) .4%	(176) .5%	(181) .4%	(198) .4%
African American	(1,272) 5.1%	(1,247) 3.0%	(1,308) 3.4%	(1,480) 3.3%	(1,531) 3.3%	(1,757) 3.6
Chicano/Latino	(3,619) 15.3%	(3,960) 10%	(4,055) 11%	(4,574) 11.7%	(5,256) 12.7%	(6,100) 13.9%
Asian	(9,863) 35.7%	(9,900) 36%	(11,023) 37.7%	(11,576) 37.6%	(12,089) 37.2%	(12,968) 38.3
White Americans	(8,827) 33%	(8,414) 31%	(10,500) 33.3%	(10,389) 33.3%	(10,949) 32.2%	(12,134) 31.1%
Other	(1,350) 5.5%	(1,386) 5.3%	(1,575) 6%	(1,672) 5.3%	(1,831) 5.3%	(1,897) 4.9%
Unknown	(910) 4.7%	(3,982) 14.3%	(2,193) 8.2%	(2,395) 8.5%	(2,585) 8.8%	(2,463) 7.7%
Total	(25,984) 9,621	(29,067) 9,699	(30,962) 9,312	(32,262) 9,886	(34,422) 9,875	(37,517) 9,428

N= Total # of applicants

Table 3 reveals admit and enrollment figures for various racial/ethnic groups who attended the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) from 1997-2002. Aside from American Indians, African Americans and Chicanos/Latinos in particular experienced the lowest percentage of admitted high seniors enrolling at UCLA. In 1997, these data indicate that UCLA enrolled 5.6 percent of admitted African American high school seniors and Chicanos/Latinos enrolled 15.8 percent. These data also reveal consistent trends in enrollment for both African American and Chicanos/Latinos from 1997-2002. When comparing the enrollment figures for Asian Americans and Whites (38.5 percent and 30 percent, respectively, in 2002) these data suggest major disparities with regard to African Americans and Chicano/Latinos matriculation at UCLA. Thus we must consider factors such as the ban on affirmative action and outreach programs that are partly related to the low enrollment of admitted African Americans and Chicanos/Latino at UCLA.

Table 3*UCLA Admits and Percent of Enrolled Freshmen by Ethnicity (Fall 1997-2002)*

	97'	98'	99'	00'	01'	02'
Ethnicity	(N) Enrolled	(N) Enrolled	(N) Enrolled	(N) Enrolled	(N) Enrolled	(N) Enrolled
American Indian	(76) 1%	(44) .4%	(37) .3%	(47) .4%	(43) .3%	(38) .4%
African American	(488) 5.6%	(294) 3.5%	(313) 3.8%	(325) 3.7%	(326) 3.4%	(337) 4%
Chicano/Latino	(1476) 15.8%	(969) 11%	(1022) 12.6%	(1152) 13.2%	(1256) 14.4%	(1310) 15.4%
Asian American	(3,431) 35.2%	(3,487) 36.3%	(3,514) 36.5%	(3,716) 37.9%	(3,677) 38.5%	(3,615) 38.5
White American	(3,172) 33%	(2,999) 30%	(3,097) 33.1%	(3,289) 32.3%	(3,178) 30.6%	(2,936) 30%
Other	(529) 5.6%	(515) 5.4%	(561) 5.8%	(520) 5.0%	(526) 5.5%	(464) 5.4%
Unknown	(449) 4.1%	(1,391) 7.8%	(768) 8.2%	(837) 7.4%	(869) 7.2%	(728) 6.3%
Total	(9,6210) 3,571	(9,699) 3,937	(9,312) 3,872	(9,886) 3,928	(9,875) 3,980	(9,428) 3,973

N= Total # of admits

Note: Figures include California high school seniors only. Non-residents are not included.

Data Source: University of California Office of the President (UCOP)

K-12 & Higher Education Collaborative Efforts

Intervention programs and policies such as “Head Start” and “No Child Left Behind” focus on providing comprehensive, interdisciplinary programs to foster academic and social development, enhancing the awareness and readiness for college of underrepresented students and their families early enough to have a positive impact. Such efforts have become an increasingly important part of institutional strategies at the state and local levels, particularly since the statewide ban on affirmative action was approved by voters in 1996. Although many intervention programs serve students early in childhood, recent high school and postsecondary collaborative efforts have also worked to guide underserved students toward four-year colleges and universities.

In 2002, African American freshman enrollment in the UC system increased slightly due to increases in enrollment at UC Irvine and UC Riverside, largely because of the 4-percent plan and outreach programs. The University of California’s 4-percent plan (e.g. dual admission plan) automatically admits the top 4 percent of every high-school graduating class in the state. Those admitted students are offered provisional admission to a UC campus, and would be required to first complete an approved two-year course of study at a community college (if necessary). However, this class-rank plan would only guarantee admission to the university system, leaving students not admitted to the campus of their choice admission elsewhere in the system. Put another way, the 4-percent plan creates a “cascading effect” as many African American and Latino students are admitted to the least selective UCs such as UC Irvine and UC Riverside rather than the flagship institutions--UC Berkeley and UCLA. This “cascading effect” may perhaps contribute in part to increased enrollment numbers at these campuses; however the community-based approach at UC Irvine and Riverside has made significant in roads. The State in fact could benefit from advancing their knowledge base on UC Irvine and

Riverside's strategic efforts to inform, recruit, and prepare underserved students. Both campuses house numerous outreach programs targeted towards underserved high school students. Outreach programs at UC Irvine, for example, were first implemented in the years following the passing of Proposition 209. This is of special significance since the students who were then in high school are now of college age and may soon join the UC Irvine community. The increases in enrollment due to outreach programming is also noteworthy- the UC Regents was forced to make major budgetary cuts in 2003. This cut has not only resulted in a major increase in tuition, but it has led to further cuts in outreach programs throughout the UC system. Outreach programs, which were highly successful in increasing African American and Latino enrollment in the UC system, will no longer exist in the high numbers that they once did. This, coupled with the increase in tuition, has resulted in a significant decline of African American applicants to the UC system.

Conclusions and Future Research

As economic, social and political equity are increasingly linked to postsecondary achievement, college access becomes one of the most pressing issues facing higher education today. California is at a major crossroads to increase the focus on creating alternative and diverse models for accessing higher education. As such, outreach programs have been significant mechanisms to help bridge the gaps by providing services to low-income and educationally disadvantaged students, which in turn captures a larger number of underserved eligible students to the University of California and California State University in the wake of California's 1996 affirmative action ban. In 2002, UC and CSU outreach programs provided tutoring, academic enrichment, and guidance to 85,000 California students in grades K-12. Interestingly, 35.8% of African American and 46.6% of Latino students who enrolled as freshman at a UC campus in fall 2003 had participated in a UC outreach program.

A major factor that perhaps makes outreach programs vulnerable to California State University's current budget cuts is the difficulty educators have documenting the effectiveness of these programs outside of anecdotal evidence. Some contend that it is difficult to demonstrate that a student who would otherwise have not gone to college is now getting a postsecondary education. Others argue that budget cuts are an opportunity to weed out lower-priority programs as well as reduce the number of minority students at California's public universities. As these debates continue, researchers might reexamine the fundamental values of academia, including support programs and both educational and political strategies that aim to improve and maintain the minority presence on predominately majority campus. In addition to questioning role and values of academia, it may also prove valuable to question the role of parents on students' future plans as emerging research reports the importance of parents in providing children with cues about how one prepares for college. In the final analysis, educational and political solutions and continued research that can be responsive to the needs of all students are essential to improving access and equity of underserved groups in an increasingly diverse society.