Affirmative Action, Percent Plans, and the Value of a Research University Education

Zach Bleemer
UC Berkeley
Who should have access to elite public research universities?
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Test-Based Meritocracy</th>
<th>Broad Representation</th>
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<td>1. Top students are most-prepared; may be good for entrepreneurship, innovation</td>
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<td>2. Helps to sort successful students into impactful and highly-cognitive occupations</td>
<td>2. Can identify high-ability low-opportunity students</td>
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<td>3. Incentivizes K-12 school performance</td>
<td>3. Benefits could spill over to disadvantaged communities</td>
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Who should have access to elite public research universities?

**Test-Based Meritocracy**

1. Top students are most-prepared; may be good for entrepreneurship, innovation
2. Helps to sort successful students into impactful and highly-cognitive occupations
3. Incentivizes K-12 school performance

**Broad Representation**

1. May improve economic mobility by promoting lower-income students

- **School “Quality”**
  - Students benefit from more resources and higher-testing peers

- **School “Fit”**
  - Students fail to perform well in more-difficult courses

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Introduction

• Today’s talk will analyze two University of California policies:
  – Race-based affirmative action
  – ‘Eligibility in the Local Context’

• I will answer three questions for each:
  1. How did the policy work?
  2. Which (and how many) students enrolled under the policy?
  3. How were they impacted in the long run?
Data and Methods

• Data comprise complete 1995-2011 UC applications, linked to:
  – Education: National Student Clearinghouse
  – Employment: CA EDD quarterly earnings

• Affirmative action analyzed using difference-in-difference around 1998 cessation

• ELC analyzed using regression discontinuity at high schools’ eligibility thresholds
Affirmative Action

How did it work?

1995 Admissions Likelihood by Academic Index and Ethnicity

Berkeley

Davis

Riverside

Red: URM       Blue: Non-URM

Academic Index = HSGPA*1000 + SAT + 3 SAT IIs
Affirmative Action

How did it work?

URM Applicants’ Admissions Advantage, 1995

Berkeley

'94-5: 1,013
'96-7: 1,025
'98-9: 271
'00-1: 454

Percent Admitted

Academic Index

Davis

'94-5: 382
'96-7: 375
'98-9: 168
'00-1: 233

Percent Admitted

Academic Index

Riverside

'94-5: 138
'96-7: 57
'98-9: 61
'00-1: 33

Percent Admitted

Academic Index

Academic Index = HSGPA*1000 + SAT + 3 SAT IIs

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Affirmative Action

*How many students were drawn in?*

- Increased URM UC enrollment by ~700 students per year (12%)

- Mostly at Berkeley and UCLA campuses (~60% increases)
Affirmative Action

How were targeted students impacted?

Difference-in-Difference Estimates on URM Outcomes after Prop. 209

Earned a Graduate Degree

Average Log CA Earnings, Age 24-37
Affirmative Action

How were targeted students impacted?

Diff-in-Diff Change in URM Applicants’ Likelihood of Earning $100,000

Implies that AA increased # of age 30-34 URM Californians earning over $100,000 annually by at least:

~550 workers
(2.5%)
Eligibility in the Local Context

How did it work?

Admissions Likelihood by GPA Distance to Eligibility Threshold

Full Sample of High Schools

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Eligibility in the Local Context

How did it work?

Admissions Likelihood by GPA Distance to Eligibility Threshold

Berkeley

Davis

Riverside

Bottom Quartile of High Schools
Eligibility in the Local Context

How many students were drawn in?

- Increased UC enrollment by 700-800 students per year at four campuses

- 45% URM; 58% from bottom-quartile high schools
Eligibility in the Local Context

Which students were drawn in?

• ELC targeted students with low test scores and family incomes but high grades:

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<th>UC Baseline</th>
<th>ELC Participants</th>
<th>Bottom-Q. ELC Participants</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Avg. SAT Score (out of 2400)</td>
<td>1796</td>
<td>-272</td>
<td>-400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avg. High School GPA</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>+0.07</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avg. Family Income</td>
<td>$87,000</td>
<td>-$20,000</td>
<td>-$41,000</td>
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• Most ELC students would have otherwise enrolled at CSUs or community colleges
Eligibility in the Local Context

How were targeted students impacted?

Regression Discontinuity Estimates of Bottom-Q. Student Outcomes

Five-Year Degree Attainment

Average CA Earnings, Age 24-26
Summary of Findings

**AA**
Massive admissions advantages for URM students at more-selective UC campuses

At least **700 URM** students per year with below-average HSGPAs and family incomes

Bumped up students’ university selectivity. **Increased graduate degree attainment and CA earnings.**

**ELC**
Guaranteed admission for top students at four middle-selectivity UC campuses

**700-800 high-HSGPA low-SAT** students per year with low family incomes

Sharply increased students’ university selectivity. **Increased BA attainment and early-career CA earnings.**
Summary of Findings

**AA**

Prohibited by Regent Policy SP-1, now repealed...

...but AA was prohibited by CA Proposition 209.

AA has not been implemented since 1998, though it has been partially replaced by ‘Holistic Review’

**ELC**

“Expanded” to top *nine* percent of students from each high school in 2012 (from four percent)...

...but every UC campus reneged on its admissions guarantee.

Instead, rejected ELC-eligible students are invited to receive an admissions offer from UC Merced

Measured take-up of Merced enrollment from ELC eligibility is 0.
1. Access-oriented admissions policies work…
   – The “Mismatch Hypothesis”, which claims that AA harms URM students, does not stand up to scrutiny.
   – University quality is an educational resource: it benefits those to whom you provide it.

2. …but not always as they’re intended…
   – It’s important to construct them carefully, and to keep watch.
   – (See: current policy-making around the SAT in admissions)

3. …and they are politically fragile.
   – In part because they crowd out higher-testing students 1-1.