There is surprising disagreement over whether disadvantaged high school graduates benefit by enrolling at highly-selective universities under access-oriented admissions policies. This talk will present analysis of two such admissions policies formerly implemented by the University of California: race-based affirmative action and a ‘percent plan’, which guarantees admission to some percent of each high school’s graduates. Long-run outcomes are estimated by linking all 1995-2011 UC applicants to a national enrollment and graduation database and to California employment records. Using difference-in-difference and regression discontinuity designs, I find that both policies substantially increased disadvantaged applicants’ likelihood of enrolling at UC, which in turn increased their five-year graduation rate by 20-30 percentage points and led to higher subsequent early- and mid-career California earnings. These findings justify large-scale access-oriented admissions policies on economic mobility grounds, and are inconsistent with the so-called ‘Mismatch Hypothesis’.

Zachary Bleemer is a PhD candidate in Economics and a National Academy of Education / Spencer Dissertation Fellow at UC Berkeley. He also directs the UC ClioMetric History Project at Berkeley’s Center for Studies in Higher Education, which has constructed one of the largest repositories of historical and contemporary university records in the United States. Zach’s research combines these data with quasi-experimental research designs to examine the long-run ramifications of young Americans’ post-secondary education and specialization decisions, with a particular focus on university policies that promote socioeconomic mobility. He has published studies on the consequences of student debt accumulation, perceived university costs, state disinvestment from public higher education, and youth natural disaster exposure in outlets including the Journal of Public Economics and the Journal of Urban Economics. Zach holds a research position at the UC Office of the President and is a member of The Campaign for College Opportunity’s Policy Research Advisory Board. He earned his B.A. in Economics, Mathematics, and Philosophy from Amherst College, and previously held research positions at the Federal Reserve Bank of New York and Mathematica Policy Research.

For questions contact Brooke Miller-Jacobs at (916) 445-5161 or bmmillerjacobs@ucdavis.edu