Undergraduate Access and Excellence at UC: Outlook for 2010-11

Overview

The University of California has received national acclaim for its success – unparalleled among other top-tier research universities – at enrolling a socioeconomically diverse student body.

Recent fee increases have raised understandable concern about UC's ability to maintain such a strong track record. Newly available data for Fall 2010 suggest that UC continues to remain financially accessible to students, including students from families with modest financial resources, students who are among the first in their family to attend college, and students who are African American, American Indian, or Latino. For Fall 2010,

- UC expects to enroll more low-income Pell Grant recipients than at any time in its history, at every campus.
- Compared to past years, a greater percentage of California high school graduates admitted to UC were:
    - From low-income families
    - First-generation college-goers
    - African American, American Indian, or Latino students
- Yield (the percentage of students admitted to UC who decide to intend) remained stable among low- and middle-income students
- The academic qualifications of California high school graduates admitted to UC remain outstanding

In addition, UC students continue to graduate with less student loan debt, on average, than borrowers at other major public and private universities.

These findings suggest that despite recent cost increases, the University's strong financial aid program – including the Blue and Gold Opportunity Plan, which ensures that fees for eligible students from families earning less than $70,000 are fully covered by grants or scholarships – have allowed UC to remain financially accessible to students from every income level.

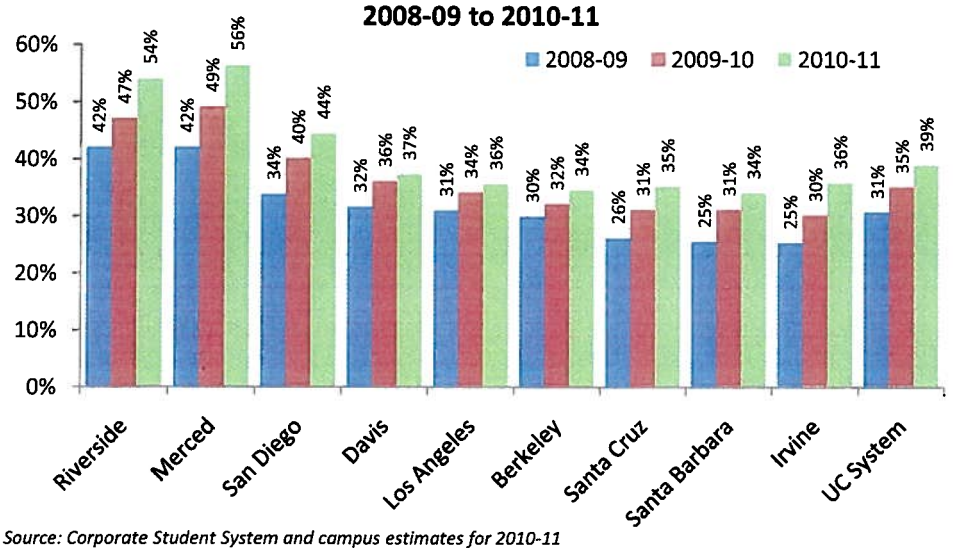
Record Levels of Pell Grant Recipients

In Fall 2010, UC expects to enroll an estimated 70,000 Pell Grant recipients among new and continuing students – the largest number of Pell Grant recipients in the University's history. An estimated 39% of all UC undergraduates will receive Pell Grants in Fall 2010.

Pell Grants are generally awarded by the federal government to students whose families have modest financial resources (e.g., typically parent incomes below $50,000 or so). A large increase in the maximum Pell Grant award in 2009-10, combined with a general decline in the national economy, increased the number of Pell Grant recipients nationwide that year. Since 2009-10, the percentage of UC students with Pell Grants has increased even further. The increase reflects both the continued worsening of the economy for California families and the University's continued ability to remain accessible to low-income students.

Display 1, below, shows the percentage of Pell recipients at each UC campus and systemwide since 2008-09.

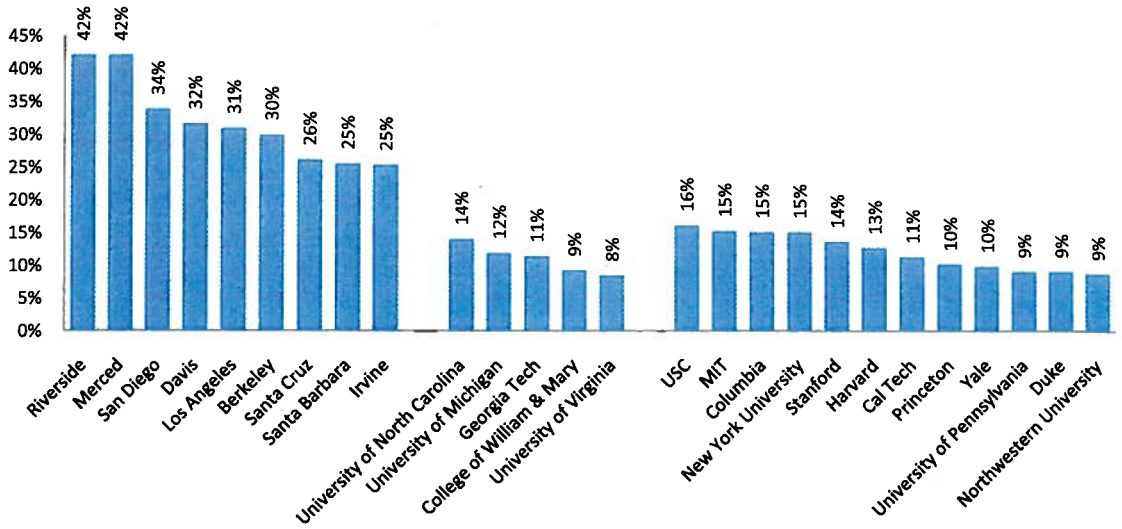
Display 1. Undergraduate Pell Grant Receipt at UC Campuses, 2008-09 to 2010-11



Source: Corporate Student System and campus estimates for 2010-11

To put these figures in perspective, it is helpful to compare Pell recipient rates at UC campuses with those at other top-ranked research universities. Display 2, below, shows comparative data from 2008-09 – the most recent year for which data about other universities are available.

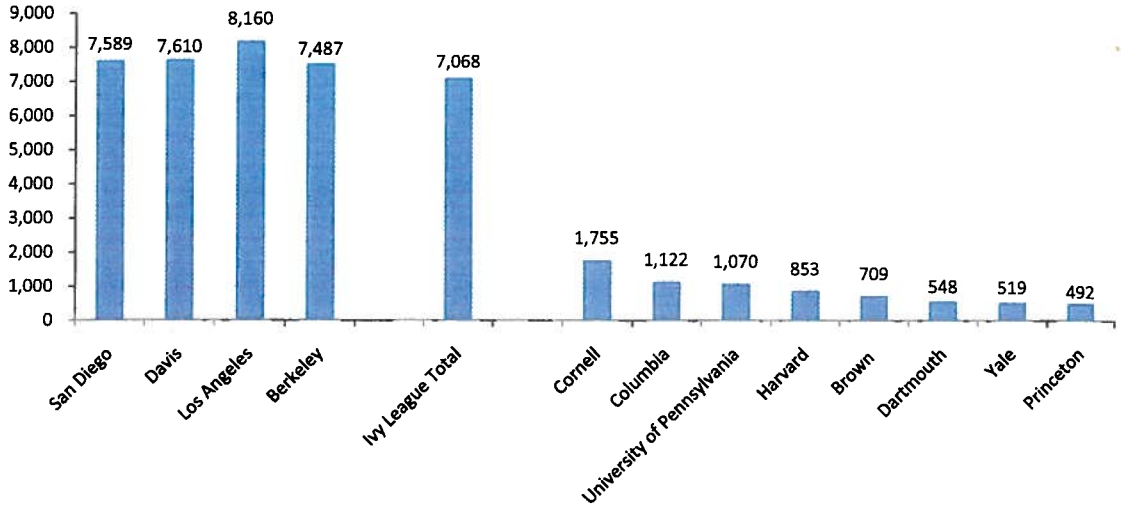
Display 2. Pell Grant Receipt at UC and Selected Top-Ranked National Universities, 2008-09



Source: IPEDS Student Financial Aid Survey

Percentages alone do not fully communicate the number of low-income Pell recipients served by UC. As shown in Display 3, below, four UC campuses – Los Angeles, Davis, San Diego, and Berkeley – *each* enrolled more Pell Grant recipients in 2008-09 that did the *entire Ivy League combined.*

Display 3. Pell Grant Recipients at UC and the Ivy League, 2008-09

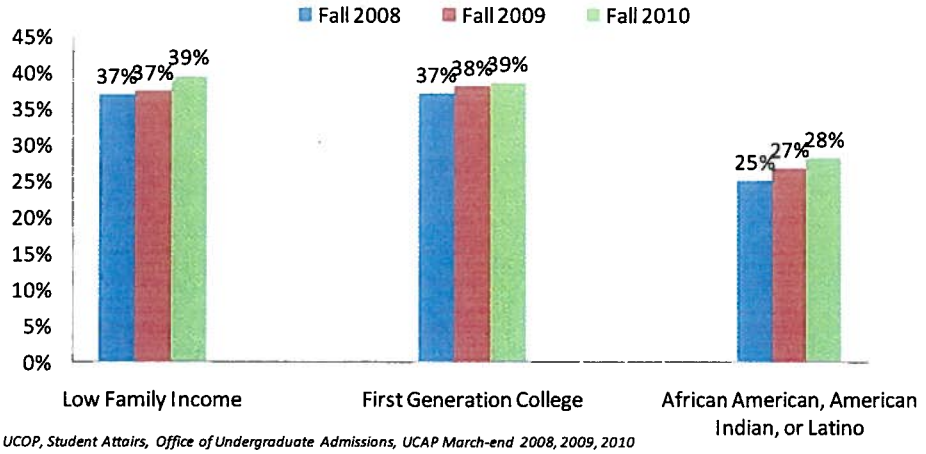


Source: IPEDS Student Financial Aid Survey

Rising Socioeconomic Diversity Among Students Admitted for Fall 2010

In Fall 2010, increasing proportions of UC's admitted freshman class were from low-income backgrounds, were among the first generation in their family to attend college, and were African American, American Indian, or Latino. See Display 4, below.

Display 4. Fall California Resident Freshman Admit Profile, 2008-2010

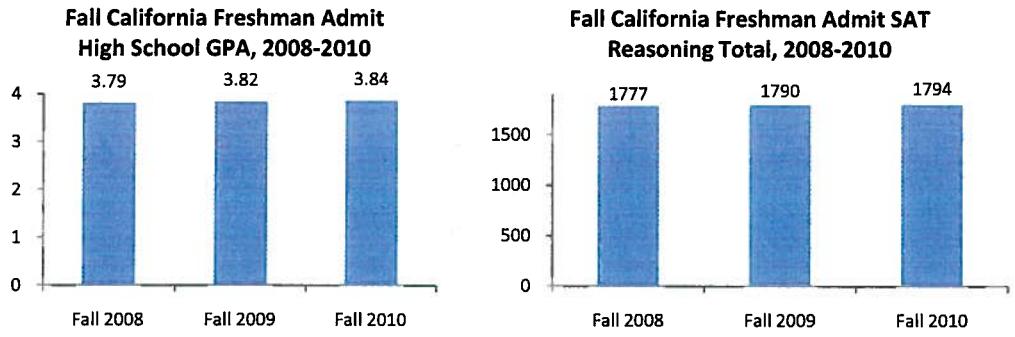


Source: *UCOP, Student Attairs, Office of Undergraduate Admissions, UCAP March-end 2008, 2009, 2010*

Academic Qualifications of UC Admits Remain Strong

The academic qualifications of students admitted UC continues to rise over time. Display 5, below, shows changes in two measures of academic preparedness – average high school grade point average and average combined SAT-R scores – among the most recent cohorts of UC freshman Fall admits.

Display 5. Academic Characteristics of California Residents Admitted as Freshmen, 2008-2010



Source: UCOP, Student Affairs, Office of Undergraduate Admissions, UCAP Month-end 2008, 2009, 2010

Low- and Middle-Income Students Continue to Choose UC

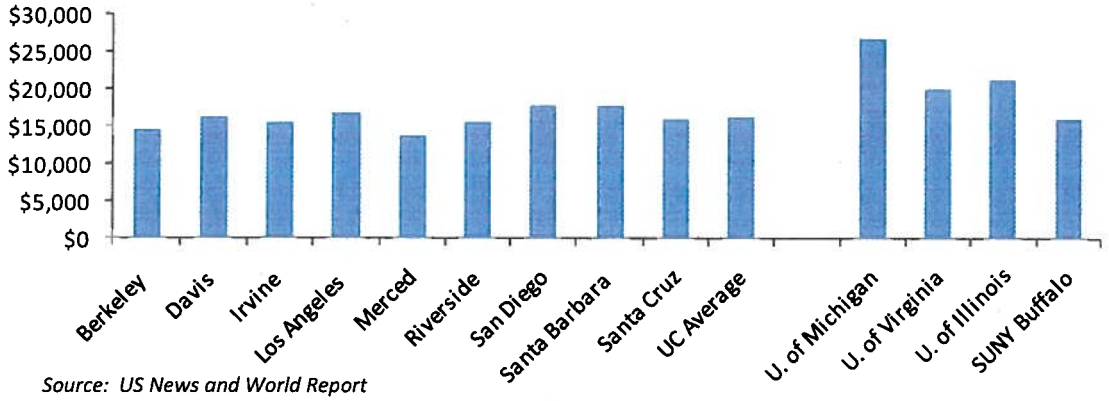
UC is becoming more selective: most campuses are admitting a smaller proportion of their applicants. The students they admit have higher overall qualifications and are thus more likely to be admitted to other good institutions, too. Consequently, the percentage of students admitted to UC who actually enroll at a UC campus – known as "yield" – typically declines slightly from one year to the next.

In Fall 2010, however, yield among low- and middle-income California residents admitted to UC as freshmen remained remarkably stable, at 58.8% and 51.1%, respectively (compared to 58.6% and 51.8% for Fall 2009). The results suggest that UC fee increases have not deterred students from low- and middle-income from pursuing a world-class UC education. For most of these students, those fee increases were fully or partly offset by additional financial aid (grants).

Debt at Graduation Remains Favorable Compared to Other Schools

Student loan debt at graduation – another indicator of an institution's financial accessibility – is lower, on average, for UC graduates than it is for graduates of many other highly ranked national public universities. Display 6, below, shows the average student loan debt at graduation for UC and UC's public comparison institutions in 2008-09, the latest year for which comparison data are available.

Display 6. Average Student Loan Debt at Graduation Among Borrowers, 2008-09 Graduating Class

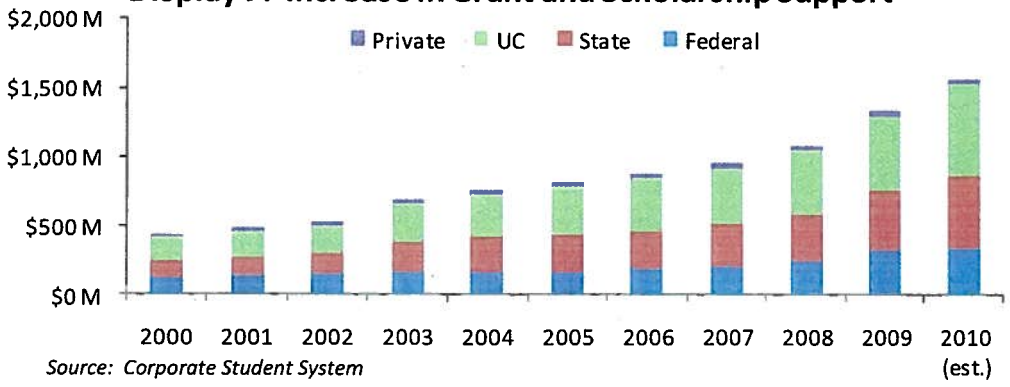


Source: US News and World Report

Expanded Access to Grants and Scholarships

While fees have increased in recent years, so too have the grants and scholarships available to UC students. Display 7, below, illustrates the substantial growth in grant and scholarship assistance awarded to UC undergraduates since 2000-01. Altogether, assistance grants and scholarships more than tripled during this period, from about $430 million in 2000-01 to over $1.5 billion in 2010-11. Over 90% of awards were made to undergraduates with financial need.

Display 7. Increase in Grant and Scholarship Support



Source: Corporate Student System

Looking Ahead

Many factors unique to UC and to California contributed to UC's continued success at enrolling and graduating California students from every income level, including many from nontraditional backgrounds. At the systemwide level, these include:

- UC's financial aid program. The University continues to make financial aid a high priority in its annual operating budget. In 2010-11, for example, the University expanded eligibility for the Blue and Gold Opportunity Plan, which ensures that systemwide fees are fully covered for UC students whose parents earn less than $70,000 (up from $60,000 in 2009-10). UC also provided grant assistance to cover one-half of the 2010-11 fee increase for financial needy middle-income students with parent incomes up to $120,000.
- The Cal Grant program. The state's continued commitment to the Cal Grant program is critical to maintaining access for low- and middle-income students to a UC education. Indeed, the Cal Grant program plays a large role in making the Blue and Gold Opportunity Plan possible.
- The quality of a UC education. The high quality of a UC education remains an excellent value for California students, despite fee increases that were required to help offset large shortfalls in state support for the University's budget. Based on the latest US News and World Report Rankings, six of the nation's top twelve top public universities are UC campuses.

Looking forward, adequate state support for public higher education – including continued support for the Cal Grant program, which benefits students in every segment – will be essential to maintaining access and affordability for California students. To date, the partnership between the state and the University has served California students and the state very well. It has survived numerous short-term economic downturns and has yielded enormous long-term economic returns to the State. Maintaining that partnership will allow UC to continue to provide life-changing intellectual and economic opportunities for generations of California students and their families – at every income level, and from every background.