

*“A school counselor in Northern California said it is the ‘middle group’ within the University of California where he is seeing change. He has a senior with straight A’s who was wait-listed at Santa Barbara. At Davis and San Diego, ‘students we assumed would be strong candidates are being wait-listed.’*

*He said that, **next year, he will be discouraging students from using any UC as a safety.**”*

## **Reports circulate of an even more difficult year to be admitted to leading California publics.** Submitted by Scott Jaschik on March 26, 2018 - 3:00am

The college counselor was stunned. One of her best students was accepted to Washington University in St. Louis. But she was wait-listed by her two "safeties," the University of California, Davis, and Cal Poly San Luis Obispo.

Another counselor said that he is seeing students either wait-listed or rejected from UC Davis or UC Santa Barbara -- students with "straight A's and maybe one or two B's" and SAT scores above 1400 or near-perfect ACT scores. He has seen even stronger students -- among the top of his school's graduating class -- getting rejected from UC San Diego.

"Our San Diego decisions look like Berkeley and UCLA decisions from years past," he said. "Students we told that 'this was a likely school' aren't getting in."

Parents -- many of whom rely on out-of-date senses of colleges' competitiveness -- are particularly shocked. "We are constantly working with parents who assume a B-plus student can go to Davis or Santa Barbara, and they can't," said the counselor.

**UCLA and Berkeley** have for years been long shots for all applicants. They **reject many students with perfect SAT scores and grade point averages**. So while many applicants are crushed by rejections at those two campuses, their counselors aren't surprised. **The difference this year, counselors say, is that other UC campuses and some California State campuses have gone up significantly in competitiveness.**

Counselors are . . . the first to admit that admissions to highly competitive institutions is not a formula. Students with particular qualities (athletic skill a good example) are routinely admitted to institutions even though they have lower grades and test scores than others who are rejected. Some students' interests make them particularly good matches . . . [But aside from special qualities,] counselors [report] consistent patterns in how applicants from their high schools are treated. And they track results carefully, so they can offer good advice to the next class of students.

And these are the counselors reporting that they are seriously surprised this year.

Rebecca Stuart-Orlowski, California private counselor sees "unusual trends" this year. HER [student] was admitted to UCLA but rejected by UCSD, when in the past, those admitted to UCLA or Berkeley typically were admitted to other UCs.

Another student received a "likely admit" letter from Cornell University and has been rejected by UC San Diego and UC Santa Barbara.

Several applicants report being rejected by all the UC campuses to which they have applied but being admitted to competitive private liberal arts colleges in New England. One student Stuart-Orlowski works with was admitted to Smith College but rejected by California State University at Long Beach.

Advising of students is changing. "UCSD can be no one's safety school anymore," Stuart-Orlowski said.

As for this year's seniors, he said, "they are panicking." He said he was particularly worried about the "limbo" created when so many students are being placed on waiting lists, with very few likely to ever be admitted. "I tell them to plan on going elsewhere and move forward with the offers they do have."

Several counselors also said that they would encourage students to remember the way many admissions officers consider "demonstrated interest" and favor applicants who have visited campus, and view those who apply without visiting as people who are using the college as a fallback.

Others said that yields could be hard to predict for out-of-state colleges that recruit top students in California. Many Californians have in the past turned down top out-of-state institutions for UC campuses that charge a fraction of the cost of private institutions. Such students may not have the option going ahead.

### **Reaction to Irvine's Miscalculation?**

One theory in California is that this year's high school seniors are paying for last year's serious miscalculation at UC Irvine. Last year, about 800 more accepted applicants than expected sent in deposits to enroll at Irvine, bringing the first-year class to an unexpectedly large 7,100. Irvine then revoked the acceptances of 500 of those new students, saying that they had not turned in all required forms. Many complained at the time that Irvine was taking a much tougher than normal stand on these forms, apparently to get out of the problem of having so many unexpected freshmen. Amid much public criticism, Irvine then revoked the revocations and made it possible for most of those students to enroll. Irvine officials consistently denied that they were enforcing the rules just to deal with the extra freshmen, but many didn't believe the university.

Many counselors say they assume the Irvine experience -- illustrating the challenge of **predicting yields** in California -- may have prompted UC campuses to use wait lists to manage their yields, rather than risk having several hundred more freshmen than planned show up.

Further, the University of California Board of Regents in January adopted a policy barring its campuses from doing what many assume Irvine did last year. Under the new policy, colleges may require verification of various matters (such as test scores and transcripts) before enrollment, but they are barred from using the verification process for any reason other than verification, and they are required to provide an appeals process for any who think they are having admissions offers revoked for inappropriate reasons.

### **Overwhelming Numbers**

University of California officials note that they are still sending out admissions decisions and say that it's too early to produce figures on admit rates, or to discuss the trends that counselors say they are seeing.

But numbers are available for total applications for the coming fall. And while UC campuses are edging up in total size, the application increases are much larger. Total (unduplicated) applications for undergraduate admission to the University of California were up 5.7 percent, but the largest increases were not at Berkeley, which was up only 4.6 percent. UC Riverside saw the largest percentage increase -- 12.2 percent.

Five UC campuses -- Berkeley, Irvine, Los Angeles, San Diego and Santa Barbara -- received more than 100,000 applications each. San Diego's total is up 9.7 percent. Davis is not far behind at 95,000 applications, up 8.6 percent. (By way of comparison, Harvard University received just under 40,000 applications last year. Application totals like those guarantee shrinking admit rates of the sort many applicants are experiencing this year.

Leading private institutions in California are seeing similar shifts. Stanford University is in many respects similar to Berkeley and simply not considered a sure thing for anyone. But the University of Southern California (with an international student body, but of which 39 percent of students are Californians) this year admitted only 13 percent of its 64,000 applicants. The admit rate dropped three percentage points in a year.

As several of the above anecdotes indicate, Cal State campuses are also becoming a stretch for many, in part because of increasing demand.

Cal Poly San Luis Obispo received 65,000 applications for admission for this fall, up 13 percent in a year. A growing number of Cal State campuses operate under "impaction," in which they are unable to admit qualified applicants and so operate with different standards for different majors, so that it becomes much more difficult to be admitted to high-demand programs, such as those in STEM fields. (Here are details on how this plays out at San Jose State University.)

The California State University system has adopted a new approach such that, in the future, those who meet Cal State admissions requirements and who are rejected by the campuses to which they apply will receive an offer for admission to another Cal State campus.

But whether that reduces pressure remains to be seen. Some Cal State campuses are much more popular than others, based on academic strengths and/or location. For the University of California, which has such a system, the pressure on applicants and on the system only seems to be growing.