College Admissions Scandal:
The Truth Behind Getting into an Ivy

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Roadmap

- Scandal Details
- Financial Advantages & Disadvantages
- Legacies
- Affirmative Action
- Test Scores/Cheating
- Athletics
- Accountability
General Information About the Scandal

- **$25 million dollar cheating ring**
  - ACT/SAT alterations
  - Fake athlete profiles

- **Universities involved: 8 total**
  - USC, UCLA, Stanford, Yale, Georgetown, Wake Forest, University of San Diego, University of Texas at Austin

- **50 people involved**
  - CEOs, business owners, actresses/actors, coaches
  - Lori Loughlin, Felicity Huffman
  - William Singer: ringleader

- **Charges**
  - Racketeering conspiracy
  - Money laundering conspiracy
  - Obstruction of justice
The infamous video of Olivia Jade (Lori Loughlin’s daughter):
“I don’t really care about school.”
Financial Advantages & Disadvantages
How do these statistics make YOU feel?

35%

The average annual percentage increase in tuition in the United States

58%
Percentage of students from the bottom 20% who enrolled in post-secondary education in 2015

82%
Percentage of students from the top 20% who enrolled in post-secondary education in 2015
Getting in is only half the battle for financially-challenged students.
The Financial Advantage or Disadvantage?

● What can wealth legally get you in the college admissions process?
  ○ Tutors
  ○ Private education
  ○ College prep services (e.g. essay reviews)
  ○ Mission/service trips to boost resume
  ○ Low student-to-counselor ratio
  ○ The advantages without a price tag
    ■ More students from top 1% than bottom 60% (Yale, Penn, etc.)

● Question:
  ○ What would a utilitarian say about the practice of “ethical help” received by affluent students?
Legacies
“Children or other close relatives of alumni have nearly three times the likelihood of being accepted as non-legacies”

- Thomas J. Espenshade, Chang Y. Chung, Joan L. Walling: “Admission Preferences for Minority Students, Athletes, and Legacies at Elite Universities”
Why Legacy?

● Legacy: student who is related to an alumni of a college

● Why do colleges have legacy practices?
  ○ Financial support and engagement
  ○ “...giving consideration to whether an applicant’s parent attended the College serves a community-building function, and contributes to a sense among all undergraduates that they are part of a lifelong educational engagement.”

● Is this legit?
  ○ Schools with Legacy preferences do have higher overall giving per alumni ($317 vs. $201)
  ○ Study done with 8 big name schools: “no short term measurable reduction in alumni giving” over course of many years.
The Effect

- **The Boost:**
  - 3 times more likely to be admitted \(^{16}\)
  - Increase of 160 points on SAT \(^{16}\)
  - All things equal, legacy gives edge over non-legacy

- **Question:**
  - *How much of an impact should family connections have on college admissions?*

### SPECIAL CATEGORIES

- **Legacy: children of Harvard College alumni**
  - Yes: 33.6% (ADMIT RATE)
  - No: 5.9%

- **Recruited athletes**
  - Yes: 86.0%
  - No: 6.0%

- **Children of Harvard faculty, staff**
  - Yes: 46.7%
  - No: 6.6%

- **Dean’s List: applicants ‘of interest’ to the admissions dean, including children of donors**
  - Yes: 42.2%
  - No: 6.1%

*Source: Harvard, WSJ*
Affirmative Action
Why Affirmative Action

- Groups: women, individuals with disabilities, minorities (Blacks, Hispanics, Native Americans, Asians) 

- Encourages holistic consideration of applicants
- Promotes the growth of disadvantaged persons
- Fosters diversity throughout campuses
- The Effect:
  - Average increase of 230 SAT points for African American Students
  - Average increase of 185 points for Hispanics
    - Larger than athletes and legacies
- Affirmative Action Ban: 
Question

Suppose there is a minority student who has grown up with a great education. To what extent is it ethical for this student to have the benefit of Affirmative Action in college admissions?
Test Scores & Cheating
Selling a Story

So here’s the first thing we need to do. And I think I mentioned this to your wife. We need to get your daughter tested for a learning difference. Here’s why. If she gets tested for a learning difference, and let’s say it’s my person that does it, or whoever you want to do it, I need that person to get her 100% extended time over multiple days. So what that means is, we’ll have to show that there’s some discrepancies in her learning, which there’s gotta be anyways. And if she gets 100%, Gordon, then, I own two schools. I can have her test at one of my schools, and I can guarantee her a score. If it’s ACT, I can guarantee her a score in the, in the 30s. And if it’s the SAT, I can guarantee her a score in the 1400s. Now, all of that, and I also need to tell [your daughter] when she gets tested, to be stupid, not to be as smart as she is. The goal is to be slow, to be not as bright, all that, so we show discrepancies. And she knows that she’s getting all this extra time, everywhere that she is right now. At the Academy kids are getting extra time all the time.
The (Nonexistent) Ethics of Cheating

● The facts:
  ○ $15,000-$75,000 per student for falsifying test scores ¹
  ○ Mike Riddle (2014 Harvard grad) has been taking College Board exams since 2012 until this past winter ⁸
  ○ Use of medical documentation to claim fake learning disabilities ⁹

● Question:
  ○ *How does this practice undermine the overall system of the use of disability services in a higher-ed setting?*
Athletic Profiles
Why do Athletes receive preference?

- Sports have a major impact on a school’s enrollment, reputation, and finances:
  - Butler University's Final Four trips
    - $1 billion in revenue
    - T-shirt sales skyrocketed
    - Website record traffic
    - Number of applications increased 40 percent
  - Many schools have reputations purely based on sports
    - North Carolina
    - Duke
    - Louisville
    - Michigan State
Things to Consider

● Star basketball player is admitted to Duke via scholarship with poor grades:
  ○ Positives:
    ■ Improves talent on team
    ■ Better record = more fans
    ■ More fans = more fun and more revenue
  ○ Negatives:
    ■ Student with higher GPA, more qualifications replaced by this athlete

● Average Joe at small D-2 school who is average at basketball but works hard is given scholarship:
  ○ Athlete is bringing little value to school
Many types of scholarships:
- Academic
- Music
- Art
- Dance
- Women
- Minorities
- Community service
- Athletic

Over $3.1 billion handed out annually in NCAA D1 and D2
- Spread across all sports, some are only partial scholarships
- Only 1 percent receive full ride

Question:
- If a student athlete does not have the best grades or qualifications but works extremely hard at mastering a sport, is it ethical for the individual to receive a scholarship over a more academically-qualified candidate?
Merit & Accountability
“...the particular definition of ‘merit’...expresses underlying power relations and tends, accordingly, to reflect the ideals of the groups that hold the power of cultural definition.”

What does ‘merit’ really mean?

- “The quality of being particularly good or worthy, especially so as to deserve praise or reward” ¹¹

- “They’re reputations run long and deep.” - Van Buskirk ⁶
  - Merit & reputation

- Rescindment of acceptance letters ⁸
  - Money, not merit
Who is accountable for the scandal?
Sources


