

Slowly, UC System Begins to Accept More Minority Students

BY SEAN CAVANAGH

The University of California system has accepted a higher percentage of underrepresented minority students for the upcoming fall semester than it did in 1997, the last year before it abolished race-based affirmative action in admissions.

The numbers offer fresh evidence, some experts said, of the system's ability to lure minority students through innovative and aggressive recruiting, despite controversial, 5-year-old changes to the 170,000-student system's admissions policies.

But the statistical gains failed to impress some critics, who contend that the last five years' worth of admissions since affirmative action ended show a university system that continues to block too many minority students from entry to the system's most selective campuses, such as Berkeley and Los Angeles.

This year, African-American, Hispanic, and Native American students accounted for 19.1 percent of the class admitted to the system's eight undergraduate schools, higher than the 18.8 percent achieved five years ago, according to figures released by the university this month.

University officials found those strides encouraging. They point to UC's revamped efforts to attract students from urban and rural high schools that hadn't been targeted before, and new admissions policies that allow officials at its eight campuses to consider a wider range of qualifications, from leadership ability to persevering despite low-income backgrounds.

"We're finally starting to see

Minority Admissions to the University of California System

The number of minority students admitted to the University of California system has returned to the levels seen before the passage of Proposition 209. Asian-Americans are not considered to be underrepresented minorities.

	1997		1998		1999		2000		2001		2002	
	Percentage of Total		Percentage of Total		Percentage of Total		Percentage of Total		Percentage of Total		Percentage of Total	
American Indian	307	0.8	292	0.7	275	0.6	255	0.6	271	0.6	292	0.6
African-American	1,435	3.7	1,193	3.0	1,331	3.1	1,328	3.2	1,508	3.3	1,620	3.3
Hispanic	5,494	14.3	5,084	13.0	5,607	13.1	5,753	13.8	6,801	14.7	7,316	15.1
Asian-American	12,771	33.2	12,625	32.2	14,358	33.6	14,306	34.2	15,554	33.7	16,350	33.8
White	15,527	40.4	13,815	35.2	17,162	40.1	15,968	38.2	17,433	37.8	18,500	38.2

SOURCE: University of California System, 2002

the fruits of more direct outreach to students," said Mae Brown, the director of admissions at UC-San Diego, where the number of minority students accepted grew. "We're being very aggressive in our visits to both high schools and community colleges, and we're seeing a pool of applicants that meets our selection process."

Carol Rowe, secondary resource counselor for the San Diego Unified School District, was encouraged by the gains for minority applicants. She credited UC officials with thinking differently about the special skills of high school applicants, beyond simply test scores and grades. Ms. Rowe works in a district that has about 142,000 students—40 percent of them Hispanic and 16 percent black.

"They're considering different factors in admission," Ms. Rowe said. "I'm delighted that the applicant pool is coming closer to reflecting the state's population."

But not everyone was as complimentary. Some observers, like

Pedro Noguera, a professor at Harvard University's graduate school of education, say too many minority students are excluded from the traditionally most-prestigious California schools under the current process.

Admissions to Berkeley and UCLA help determine "who gets to go to medical school, who goes into doctoral programs," said Mr. Noguera, a former professor at Berkeley. "It's a ripple effect. There's no reason to celebrate these numbers."

The percentage of minority students accepted still lags far behind the overall numbers of minorities in California, he added.

Revised Policies

The increases recorded come amid a steady growth in the popularity of UC's undergraduate schools, where applications rose 4.9 percent over the past year to include 48,369 prospective students.

The latest admissions information does not include high school

students who applied to California's public universities from out of state. And campus officials still face the task of trying to persuade the prospective students who have gained admittance to actually enroll at their schools.

Several campuses saw the numbers of underrepresented minorities rise from last year, with UC-San Diego and UCLA making the largest percentage gains. The proportion of those groups admitted to the San Diego school climbed from 11.5 percent in 2001 to 14.4 percent this year, an increase of about 600 students.

In 1995, the University of California's regents voted to phase out race-based affirmative action as a factor in granting admissions to its campuses, a vote they reversed several years later. But California voters in 1996 approved Proposition 209, a controversial state ballot initiative that barred race as a factor for hiring or admissions at any state institution.

In the years after the ban on

affirmative action, the number of underrepresented minorities plummeted at several campuses, including Berkeley and UCLA. Berkeley's proportion of underrepresented minorities admitted fell from 25.3 percent in 1997 to 11 percent the next year, and hovers at 17.5 percent today, up slightly from last year.

By contrast, the percentage of those minority groups admitted to UC-Riverside rose substantially, from 20.6 percent five years ago to 26.1 percent for this year's fall class.

In 2000, the UC regents tried to broaden diversity in the system by guaranteeing admission to one of the campuses for students graduating in the top 4 percent of their high school classes.

California's university system also reshaped admissions criteria this year to allow for "comprehensive review," which gives campuses more flexibility to consider factors outside academics, such as applicants' poverty levels and where they live in the state, in addition to special talents.