



**Digital Commons@**

Loyola Marymount University  
LMU Loyola Law School

---

LMU/LLS Theses and Dissertations

---

2023

## **Underrepresented Students' Perspectives on Higher Education Equity in the University of California's Elimination of the Standardized Testing Requirement: A Critical Policy Analysis**

Yufei Chen

Loyola Marymount University, yufeichen0808@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/etd>



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

---

### **Recommended Citation**

Chen, Yufei, "Underrepresented Students' Perspectives on Higher Education Equity in the University of California's Elimination of the Standardized Testing Requirement: A Critical Policy Analysis" (2023). *LMU/LLS Theses and Dissertations*. 1259.

<https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/etd/1259>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Loyola Marymount University and Loyola Law School. It has been accepted for inclusion in LMU/LLS Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons@Loyola Marymount University and Loyola Law School. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@lmu.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@lmu.edu).

LOYOLA MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY

Underrepresented Students' Perspectives on Higher Education Equity in the University of  
California's Elimination of the Standardized Testing Requirement: A Critical Policy Analysis

by

Yufei Chen

A dissertation presented to the Faculty of the School of Education,

Loyola Marymount University,

in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education

2023

Underrepresented Students' Perspectives on Higher Education Equity in the University of  
California's Elimination of the Standardized Testing Requirement: A Critical Policy Analysis

Copyright © 2023

by

Yufei Chen

**Loyola Marymount University  
School of Education  
Los Angeles, CA 90045**

This dissertation written by Yufei Chen, under the direction of the Dissertation Committee, is approved and accepted by all committee members, in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

August 22, 2023

Date

Dissertation Committee

*Magaly Lavadenz*

Magaly Lavadenz, Ph.D., Dissertation Chair

*William Perez*

William Perez, Ph.D., Committee Member

*Elizabeth Stoddard*

Elizabeth Stoddard, Ph.D., Committee Member

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want first to acknowledge the inspiration, dedication, and positivity provided by Professor Magaly Lavadenz over the past two years. Professor Lavadenz is not only my dissertation chair but also an alumna from the University of Southern California, an academic and professional mentor, and a dedicated leader and change maker in education for immigrants, language learners, and/or underrepresented minority students, teachers, and administrators in California and across the United States. For the past two years, I have been guided and challenged to enhance my knowledge, critical thinking, and research skills in education policy analysis, critical race theory movement, and equity advancement. Her passion and commitment to education leadership, policy research, and social justice have inspired me to become an impactful scholar, mentor, and education leader like her. There were at least three times when she caught a cold or the coronavirus, but she still stuck with me and stayed up late to work on my paper or presentation revision. There were many days when I felt demotivated and overly stressed about making progress with this dissertation due to low self-efficacy, but Professor Lavadenz were always positive, encouraging, and supporting me through the difficult periods. Now, I frequently quote her words, “Just keep making progress,” and “As long as you are making progress” to motivate the students and college counselors with whom I work through my college counseling agency. I genuinely appreciate Professor Lavadenz’s dedication of time, mentorship, inspiration, care, and love to me and this dissertation.

Second, I want to acknowledge the quality time and guidance offered by the two committee members of this dissertation—Professors William Perez and Elizabeth Stoddard. Professor Perez’ research and advocacy for undocumented immigrant students significantly

impacted and inspired me; he also connected me with previous cohort members of the EdD program so that I could learn about their experiences and research projects. Professor Stoddard has shared not only great sources and ideas relevant to this dissertation for the past two years, but also her personal, educational, and professional experiences to help me navigate my academic and professional paths. I thank both committee members for going beyond the committee roles, building mentorship relations, and sharing personal resources with me to support my dissertation progress and personal growth.

Third, I want to thank my husband, Quentin Chen; my mom, Huimin Zheng; my dad Yongge Chen; and my parents-in-law, Shuping Zhong and Yaohua Chen. Thank you all for supporting my pursuit of an advanced degree while simultaneously occupied with my career. While tolerating my limited fulfillment of family responsibilities, they have constantly provided me with emotional support and affirmation for the past three years to complete my Doctor of Education degree. Additionally, I am grateful for my caring and loving cohort members of the EdD program at Loyola Marymount University. Special thanks to my cohort member Dr. Nina Benegas who constantly shared learning and researching resources and kept me posted with all the program timelines and expectations. More importantly, she introduced me to Megan Barnes, a writing expert who helped edit the grammar of this dissertation and formatted the entire document to align with APA 7th edition.

Lastly, I want to thank all my research participants—underrepresented minority students attending four-year universities in California at the time of their participation, many of whom have intersectional identities of low-income, first-generation college student, immigrant, and/or

language learner. If it had not been for their compassion and willingness to contribute to this study and share their lived experiences, I would not have accomplished this dissertation.

This project is dedicated to advocating for more effective policies, programs, and practices for all the URM students who have experienced long-term oppression from the higher education system and internalized oppression caused by it. This dissertation is dedicated to addressing the perpetuating reality of race, racism, and socioeconomic gaps. This dissertation is also dedicated to being part of the critical race theory movement and providing counter-narratives for URM students, especially those with intersectional identities. Higher education equity is yet to be achieved, but because of the hard-to-reverse status quo, I mean to change this complex oppressive system.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>LIST OF TABLES .....</b>	<b>x</b>
<b>LIST OF FIGURES .....</b>	<b>xi</b>
<b>ABSTRACT .....</b>	<b>xii</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
Background of U.S. Higher Education .....	1
The Case of California .....	3
The University of California as Government Contractors.....	4
Chronological Review of UC Regents Policies and on the Standardized Tests Requirement.....	6
The First Two-Year Results of UC’s Elimination of the Standardized Tests Requirement.....	7
Inconsistent U.S. Freshman Admission Policies of Standardized Tests.....	9
Statement of the Problem.....	11
Research Questions.....	12
Research Design and Methodology .....	13
Purpose of the Study .....	14
Significance of the Study .....	15
Theoretical Framework.....	17
Definitions of Terms .....	18
Underrepresented Minority Students (URM students) .....	18
First-Generation College Students.....	18
Low-Income Students .....	19
Higher Education Equity.....	19
Selectivity .....	19
College Planning.....	21
College Application .....	21
UC’s Comprehensive Review.....	22
Limitations .....	23
Delimitations.....	23
Assumptions.....	24
Conclusion .....	25
<b>CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW .....</b>	<b>27</b>
Critical Policy Analysis .....	27
Critical Race Theory .....	29
Normality and Permanence of Racism .....	29
Social Construction of Racism.....	30
Experiential Knowledge Through Counter-Storytelling.....	30
Intersectionality.....	32
Interest Convergence .....	33
History of U.S. Higher Education.....	34



Affirmative Action.....	35
Post-Affirmative Action in California .....	37
Underrepresented Minority Students College Planning and Application.....	40
URM Students’ Barriers to Accessing Higher Education.....	41
Internalized Oppression .....	43
College Counseling Practices and Programs that Support URM Students.....	44
Funds of Knowledge.....	46
The University of California’s Admission Policies .....	48
The University of California’s Admissions Policies for Equity Advancement.....	48
Research on the University of California’s Admission Policies.....	51
The University of California’s Admission Policies of the Standardized Tests Requirement. ....	52
History of the University of California’s Standardized Tests Requirement.....	53
Critiques of the Standardized Tests for College Entrance .....	55
UC’s Elimination of the Standardized Tests Requirement after the COVID-19 Pandemic.....	58
The First Two-Year Results of UC’s Elimination of the Standardized Tests Requirement .....	60
Student Perceptions and Experiences under Education Policy Reform.....	62
Conclusion .....	64
<b>CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>68</b>
Research Questions.....	69
Research Design.....	70
Qualitative Data Collection.....	71
Participants Selection Criteria.....	71
Sampling Method.....	72
Recruitment Procedures .....	72
Data Collection Procedures.....	73
Instrumentation .....	74
Reliability.....	90
Validity and Trustworthiness.....	91
Qualitative Data Analysis .....	92
Data Analysis Procedures .....	93
<b>CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS.....</b>	<b>96</b>
Introduction.....	96
Research Questions.....	97
Demographic Survey Results.....	98
Themes.....	100
Insidiousness of Higher Education Racism: The Role of Standardized Testing in Admissions .....	101
Internalized Oppression of the Legitimization of the Standardized Tests Requirement .....	102

Intersectionality of Race, Income, First-Generation College Students, and Pandemic Experience.....	102
URM Students’ Increased Trust in UC’s Admissions System .....	103
Insidiousness of Higher Education Racism: The Role of Standardized Testing in Admissions .....	104
Intrinsic Racism of the SAT .....	104
The Standardized Testing Industrial Complex .....	108
Countering Internalized Oppression of the Legitimization of the Standardized Tests Requirement .....	111
False Perception of the SAT as the Most Important Determinant.....	111
Low Self-Efficacy and Demotivation of Attending Four-Year Higher Education .....	113
Deconstructed Internalized Oppression by the Policy Reform.....	116
URM Students’ Decisions to Pursue Selective, Four-Year Higher Education .....	119
Disproportionate Policy Effectiveness on Alleviating Internalized Oppression .....	121
Intersectionality of Race, Income, First-Generation College Students’ Status, and Pandemic Impacts .....	124
Perspectives of Low-Income Students .....	125
Perspectives of First-Generation College Students.....	128
Perspectives Towards the COVID-19 Pandemic and Distance Learning.....	130
The Support System Recognizing Funds of Knowledge .....	135
URM Student’s Increased Trust in UC’s Admissions System .....	140
Low Trust in UC’s Higher Education System or its Admissions Process....	140
Increased Trust in Comprehensive Review of UC’s Admissions Process ...	144
Increased Trust in School Counselors and Teachers .....	148
Increased Fairness and Opportunities of Admissions Process, but Not Necessarily Equity .....	151
Conclusion .....	157

**CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, AND IMPLICATIONS .....161**

Introduction.....	161
Discussion.....	162
Improving College Access for URM Students: A Multi-Player Support System ....	162
Four-Year Higher Education Enrollment and Success After the Policy Reform .....	166
Addressing Long-Term Disparities of Secondary Education System .....	172
UC’s Counter-Action of Proposition 209 and the Supreme Court’s Rulings in 2023.....	176
Research Implications.....	179
Conclusion Through Higher Education Interest Convergence .....	183
Higher Education Interest Convergence in the Post-COVID-19 Pandemic Era.....	183
Higher Education Admissions Equity for Highly selective Institutions.....	187

<b>APPENDIX A</b> .....	<b>190</b>
<b>APPENDIX B</b> .....	<b>192</b>
<b>APPENDIX C</b> .....	<b>199</b>
<b>APPENDIX D</b> .....	<b>200</b>
<b>APPENDIX E</b> .....	<b>203</b>
<b>APPENDIX F</b> .....	<b>206</b>
<b>APPENDIX G</b> .....	<b>209</b>
<b>APPENDIX H</b> .....	<b>211</b>
<b>APPENDIX I</b> .....	<b>217</b>
<b>APPENDIX J</b> .....	<b>221</b>
<b>REFERENCES</b> .....	<b>223</b>

## LIST OF TABLES

<b>Table</b>	<b>Page</b>
1. URM Students’ UC Application and Admissions, CA Residents (2020-2022).....	8
2. Admissions Rates and Selectivity Level of UC Campuses .....	20
3. Affirmative Action Legislations Timeline in California .....	38
4. UC’s Admission Policies for Equity Advancement.....	49
5. The First Two-Year Results of UC’s Elimination of the Standardized Tests Requirement, CA Residents.....	60
6. Data Collection and Analysis Timeline .....	73
7. The Demographic Survey Items Construct.....	75
8. The Focus Group Protocol Constructs.....	79
9. The Interview Protocol Constructs .....	83
10. Participant Demographic Survey Results .....	99
11. URM Students With Intersectional Identities’ Barriers for Succeeding in Four-Year Higher Education and the Roles of UC’s Elimination of the Standardized Testing Requirement .....	125
12. URM Freshman Application, Admissions, and Enrollment Statistics, CA Residents (2020-2022) .....	168
13. URM Freshman Students’ Enrollment Rate After Admissions, CA Residents (2020-2022).....	169
14. URM Freshman Students’ Application, Admissions, and Enrollment Proportion to All Freshman Students, CA Residents (2020-2022).....	174
15. URM Versus White Students’ Freshman Admissions and Enrollment, CA Residents (2020-2022).....	185
16. URM and White Freshman Students’ Application, Admissions, and Enrollment Proportion to All Freshman Students, CA Residents (2020-2022).....	186
17. URM Versus White Student’s Freshman Application and Enrollment, CA Residents (2020-2022) .....	187

## LIST OF FIGURES

<b>Figure</b>	<b>Page</b>
1. Three Phases of Data Analysis .....	93

## ABSTRACT

Underrepresented Students' Perspectives on Higher Education Equity in the University of California's Elimination of the Standardized Testing Requirement: A Critical Policy Analysis

by

Yufei Chen

In July 2022, the University of California (UC) permanently eliminated the standardized tests requirement for its freshman admissions in order to alleviate the severed socioeconomic gap and college access barriers that were heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic. This critical policy analysis research explored the immediate effects of UC's policy reform on higher education equity. All 14 participants were underrepresented minority (URM) students who applied to at least one UC campus for fall 2022's freshman admissions and were enrolled in four-year universities at the time of this study.

From demographic surveys, focus groups, and in-depth interviews, I applied critical race theory (CRT) tenets and internalized oppression theory to explore, interpret, and provide counter-narratives of URM students' college planning and application experiences after the policy reform. From analyzing these students' perceptions of the elimination of the standardized tests requirement and UC's admissions equity, I identified the following four findings:

1. Insidiousness of Higher Education Racism: The Role of Standardized Testing in Admissions
2. Enduring Internalized Oppression: The Lingering Effects of the Legitimization of Standardized test requirement

3. Intersectionality of Race, Income, First-Generation College Students' Status, and  
Pandemic Impacts

4. Increased Trust in the Higher Education Admissions System

After application and identification, I critically discussed the research findings and provided implications for future policies, practices, and research directions for higher education admissions equity based on the four findings. In conclusion and alignment with the CRT tenet of interest convergence, UC's policy has increased opportunities for all students and has benefited both White and underrepresented minority URM students in terms of their acceptance into highly selective, four-year universities.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### **Background of U.S. Higher Education**

American colonists founded the first few higher education institutions in the 17th century. Only White Christian males were allowed to enroll and study at these colleges, while White women and Black men and women were denied their right to higher education. During the Common School Movement in the 19th century, the idea that “publicly supported schools could and should exist for all children” was instigated (Kaestle, 1983). The first public, or free, schools were built and funded to provide education for female students, students from low socioeconomic status, and those with non-Christian religious affiliations. However, these schools were still only open to White children. It was not until and after the Reconstruction Era that the federal government got involved and expanded educational opportunities for Black students by establishing public schools in the former slave-holding states that enrolled Black students and by eventually increasing the higher education access of Black students through grants and legislation—such as the 15th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution: Voting Rights (1870) and the *Morrill Act of 1890* (National Archives, 2022).

In the history of U.S. education, higher education institutions fell behind elementary and secondary schools in advancing equity among students of all backgrounds. After more than a century, race and racism are still prevalent in the United States. In the 1960s, a few legislations mandated affirmative action, such as President Kennedy’s Executive Order 10925 (1961), the *Civil Rights Act of 1964*, and *Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974*, to address the historical underrepresentation and discrimination based on race and gender in the U.S. workforce



and education system (Brunner & Rowen, 2022; Fullinwider, 2018; Kennedy, 1961). However, the unearned preferences of individuals for higher education or employment opportunities and financial aid—support based on race and gender—has raised controversies and questions about another form of discrimination against White people. Therefore, nine states have since banned affirmative action: California (1996), Washington (1998), Florida (1999), Michigan (2006), Nebraska (2008), Arizona (2010), New Hampshire (2012), Oklahoma (2012), and Idaho (2020) (Brunner & Rowen, 2022; Potter, 2014). Although affirmative action is banned in many states, there is an urgent need to address the long-term disparities in higher education faced by historically underrepresented students. This is especially true since accessing and completing a higher education degree has become increasingly essential for individuals to participate in the U.S. labor market and improve their socioeconomic status.

Since 2000, attaining a college education or a post-secondary degree for students in the United States has been increasingly recognized as a critical determinant to accessing employment opportunities and, by extension, elevating one's social and economic status (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). According to the United States Census Bureau (2021), in 2020, full-time working individuals with bachelor's degrees—on average—earned 54% more than those with associate degrees, and 79% more than those with high school diplomas. Regarding the monetary value, the median annual income of full-time working individuals with bachelor's degrees was \$29,253 higher than those with associate degrees, and \$36,842 higher than those with high school diplomas (United States Census Bureau, 2021).

However, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES; 2022a), the immediate college-going rate for high school completers was 63% in 2020; categorized by race,

Black high school graduates had the lowest rate of 54%, followed by Hispanic (60%), while White students had a rate of 67% and Asian had a rate of 86%. About 1 million among the 3.1 million high school graduates did not access higher education (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022a). Thus, a bachelor's degree can significantly impact individuals' earnings and quality of life in the United States; however, more than a third of high school graduates in the United States have not successfully enrolled in higher education—with a majority being that of Hispanic and Black students. Attending college and acquiring a four-year college degree could be effective solutions for students and their families to elevate their social-economic status.

### **The Case of California**

This study specifically explored the higher education access and equity issues in California for a few reasons. First, California has a large portion of historically underrepresented students. Among the Californian population, it was estimated in 2022 that 40.3% of these students are Hispanic/Latinx, 6.5% are Black, and 1.7% are Indian/Native American, meaning that underrepresented minority (URM) groups constitute almost half of the entire population (United States Census Bureau, 2022). Additionally, there are nearly 11 million immigrants in California, making up about 27% of California's population in 2019 and 25% of the entire foreign-born population in the United States (Johnson et al., 2021). From 2014 to 2019, the total fall enrollment in private degree-granting postsecondary institutions in California dropped by 11.6%, that of public enrollment increased by 3.7%, while overall total fall enrollment in degree-granting postsecondary institutions in California increased by 0.7% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022a). This means that California's public postsecondary institutions are increasingly responsible for providing higher education to its residents.

Second, California was the first among the nine states that banned affirmative action. In 1996, after three decades, the *California Civil Rights Initiative* (Proposition 209, 1996) was adopted into California's state constitution to ban state-sponsored affirmative action in public employment and college admissions, with 54% of California voters voting "YES." Proposition 209 was passed but eliminating affirmative action for college and university admissions remained controversial considering the state's goals of providing universal education and prioritizing equity for historically underrepresented students. In June 2023, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that race-based admissions of Harvard University and University of North Carolina violated the *Civil Rights Act of 1964* and the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment in June 2023 (*Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. President and Fellows of Harvard College*, 2023; *Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. University of North Carolina*, 2023). This has meant that U.S. higher education institutions from all states should adopt race-neutral admissions approaches for fall 2024 onwards. Therefore, studying higher education admissions policies in California could provide policy implications for higher education institutions from other states that had been practicing affirmative action before June 2023.

### **The University of California as Government Contractors**

The University of California (UC) system is comprised of leading public research universities and enrolls and educates top-ranked students from California, the United States, and internationally. The Board of Regents governs UC system schools as a public trust and receives Pell Grants from the federal government (up to \$6,495 per undergraduate student in 2021-2022) and Cal Grants from the State of California (up to \$12,570 for college tuition per undergraduate student in 2021-2022). Despite this aid, UC still maintains institutional autonomy granted by the

California Constitution (Legislative Analyst’s Office, 2021). This autonomy, however, is not all-encompassing, and UC’s policies and practices must follow the constitutions of California and the federal government. Under the *Higher Education Act of 1965* (1965) and the *Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974*, educational agencies were mandated to take appropriate action to ensure equal educational opportunities for students of any race, gender, and nationality. Therefore, UC has been a “contractor” of the federal and state governments and therefore distributes the grants to ensure their students’ equal participation in higher education.

Nevertheless, in recognizing the diverse population of California, UC has developed its mission to ensure diversity: “The knowledge that the University of California is open to qualified students from all groups, and thus serves all parts of the community equitably, helps sustain the social fabric of the State” (University of California Office of the President, 2020). In response to the *California Civil Rights Initiative* (Proposition 209, 1996), UC has developed a series of admission policies and programs to prioritize equity, including the UC Eligibility in the Local Context (ELC) program and the comprehensive review approach that lowers the weight of standardized test scores and considers the individual and family circumstances of applicants (Antonovics & Backes, 2014; Regents of the University of California, n.d.; University of California Office of the President, 2019; University of California Office of the President & Student Academic Services, 2002). However, after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the University of California Board of Regents shifted from reduced importance of SAT and ACT consideration to no SAT/ACT consideration in May 2020 (University of California Board of Regents, 2020).

## **Chronological Review of UC Regents Policies on the Standardized Tests Requirement**

On May 21, 2020, the Regents of the University of California voted to suspend the test scores section for freshman admissions from fall 2021 to fall 2024. The UC’s Regents Policy 2103—Policy on Undergraduate Admissions Requirements listed the test requirement: “Applicants for admission as freshmen must submit scores on an approved test of Mathematics, Language Arts and Writing” (Appendix A; University of California Office of the President, 2022a). The suspension of standardized test scores—which meant that they would no longer be considered as one factor of the comprehensive review by UC undergraduate admissions—sought to improve UC admissions equity, especially under the severe negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on students, households, and secondary schools (University of California Office of the President, 2019; 2020).

During the suspension, University of California Office of the President asked the Academic Senate to form the Smarter Balanced Study Group, which attempted to develop a new assessment—the Smarter Balanced assessment—to measure freshman applicants’ UC readiness (The Smarter Balanced Study Group, 2021). According to the University of California Office of the President, “If by 2025 the new test is either unfeasible or not ready, consideration of the ACT/SAT for freshman admissions would still be eliminated for California students” (2020). In September 2021, the Smarter Balanced Study Group (2021) reported their evaluations of the feasibility and necessity of the Smarter Balanced assessment: It recommended that the assessment should not be adopted in UC freshman admissions.

Endorsing this recommendation, the Regents of the University of California decided to permanently eliminate the standardized tests requirement for UC freshman admissions with no

end date (Appendix B; University of California Office of the President, 2022b). Then, Regents Policy 2103—Policy on Undergraduate Admissions Requirements, which still included standardized tests as one of the requirements, needed to be revised and thus was rescinded by the Regents of the University of California (Appendix B; University of California Office of the President, 2022b). Accordingly, seven separate Regents Policies related to freshman admissions requirements were amended and consolidated into Regents Policy 2102—Policy on Undergraduate Admissions (University of California Board of Regents, 2022; University of California Office of the President, 2022b). Appendix B is the Regents of the University of California’s meeting report of the rationale and the detailed Regents Policies amendment about the rescission of Regents Policy 2103 and the amendment of Regents Policy 2102 (University of California Board of Regents, 2020; University of California Office of the President, 2022b).

### **The First Two-Year Results of UC’s Elimination of the Standardized Tests Requirement**

As presented in Table 1, the number of underrepresented minority (URM) students’ applications and admissions to UC campuses increased after the first two years of UC’s elimination of standardized tests requirement and broke the record from previous years.

**Table 1***URM Students' UC Application and Admissions, CA Residents (2020-2022)*

UC Campus	URM Freshman Application			URM Freshman Admissions			URM Freshman Admissions Rate		
	Fall 2020	Fall 2021	Fall 2022	Fall 2020	Fall 2021	Fall 2022	Fall 2020	Fall 2021	Fall 2022
UC Los Angeles	26308	34429	38275	2720	2836	2903	10.3%	8.2%	7.6%
UC Berkeley	17004	22445	27335	3495	3559	3589	20.6%	15.9%	13.1%
UC Irvine	32075	32326	35533	4749	6431	6332	14.8%	19.9%	17.8%
UC Santa Barbara	23526	26008	26128	6361	6866	7146	27.0%	26.4%	27.3%
UC San Diego	24411	28186	31970	6112	7444	8501	25.0%	26.4%	26.6%
UC Davis	19602	22157	23521	6556	7415	6541	33.4%	33.5%	27.8%
UC Santa Cruz	18127	19458	20569	8804	9612	7997	48.6%	49.4%	38.9%
UC Riverside	22821	23202	22583	11756	12689	12813	51.5%	54.7%	56.7%
UC Merced	14137	13322	12335	12670	12713	12935	89.6%	95.4%	104.9%
Overall (URM)	50621	57406	59818	33012	36208	37134	65.2%	63.1%	62.1%
URM Proportion	44.7%	44.8%	45.2%	41.3%	43.0%	43.5%			
All Students	113339	128128	132337	79953	84223	85268	70.5%	65.7%	64.4%

*Note.* Adapted from *Table 2.1 University of California Freshman Applications by Campus and Race/Ethnicity Fall 2020, 2021, and 2022 [Data Set]* by University of California Office of the President, 2022c, copyright 2023 by University of California Office of the President, Graduate, Undergraduate and Equity Affairs, Admissions; *Table 2.1 University of California Freshman Admissions by Campus and Race/Ethnicity Fall 2020, 2021, and 2022 [Data Set]* by University of California Office of the President, 2022d, copyright 2023 by University of California Office of the President, Graduate, Undergraduate and Equity Affairs, Admissions.

Underrepresented minority (URM) students' application and admissions numbers increased overall for most UC campuses from fall 2020 to fall 2022. The proportion of URM student applicants increased from 44.7% for fall 2020 to 45.2% for fall 2022, and the proportion of URM students' admissions increased from 41.3% for fall 2020 to 43.5% for fall 2022 (University of California Office of the President, 2022c; 2022d).

It is worth noticing that the freshman admissions rate (calculated by dividing the admissions number by application number) for URM students decreased for four UC campuses—including UCLA and UC Berkeley, the two most selective UC campuses—and decreased overall from 65.2% for fall 2020 to 62.1% for fall 2022 (University of California

Office of the President, 2022c; 2022d). These numbers indicate that after UC eliminated the standardized tests requirement, URM student applicants faced more competition when applying to UC schools, and the possibilities of accessing selective, four-year universities decreased, albeit slightly. Moreover, not just URM students, but all students have benefited from the policy reform, indicated by the increased numbers of all applications and admissions in Table 1.

Although decreasing, UC freshman admissions rate was still higher than those for URM students after two years of the policy reform's implementation (University of California Office of the President, 2022d).

Therefore, the analysis of UC's freshman applications and admissions statistics implies the following two qualitative inquiries: How and why the policy reform has led to increased applications and admissions of URM students? How and why has UC's elimination of standardized tests' requirement advanced—or not—higher admissions equity, given the increased applications and admissions numbers of all students?

### **Inconsistent U.S. Freshman Admissions Policies of Standardized Tests**

The implementation of the University of California and other four-year colleges' policy reforms regarding the standardized tests requirement since fall 2021—that being no consideration of the SAT/ACT versus optional submission of the SAT/ACT—has influenced all high school students' college planning and application process overall.

On the one hand, when the SAT/ACT were not considered for an applicant's admission decision, the University of California's comprehensive review admission process became more unclear because the standardized tests were one of the few quantitative criteria among all the application materials. Although UC has never been transparent about the specific matrix or



weight of each criterion, eliminating consideration of standardized tests could make the prospective students less oriented to prepare and increase their chances of admission. On the other hand, other selective, four-year colleges—including private universities (such as the University of Southern California) or other public universities outside California (such as Penn State University)—have adopted test-optional policies until fall 2023 or fall 2024 (Penn State Undergraduate Admissions, n.d.; University of Southern California Undergraduate Admission, n.d.). With these test-optional policies, the schools still consider standardized test scores if applicants choose to submit them.

As a result, students who decide to apply to UC schools and other four-year colleges may need help allocating their time and energy to prepare for standardized tests and engage in other extracurricular and academic activities. Based on my 9-year counseling experience, I assume that student applicants for the University of California for fall 2021 to fall 2024 experienced, or are experiencing, some unprecedented college planning and application processes under the influence of UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement and other schools' test-optional policies. To adapt to the admissions policy reforms and navigate the college planning and application process, student applicants may feel less stressed and more prepared as the standardized tests and the related barriers caused by the tests and their preparation are removed. Alternatively, given the inconsistent admission policies of UC and other U.S. universities, students may feel a lack of guidance and resources to navigate the college planning and application process and get access to selective, four-year higher education. For URM students specifically, the question is raised on how UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement has influenced their college planning and application processes.

## Statement of the Problem

From fall 1958 to fall 2020, UC considered standardized test scores a required criterion to evaluate applicants' academic aptitudes—regardless of the weight of this component—and to different groups of students before and after affirmative actions (University of California Office of the President, 2021). The University of California's initial suspension of the standardized tests requirement from fall 2021 to fall 2024 enrollments was an unprecedented policy change among highly selective universities in the United States; many other higher education institutions adopted two-year or three-year standardized test-optional policies since fall 2021 admissions. The policy was developed and implemented to advance higher education equity as the COVID-19 pandemic increased the socioeconomic gap and affected URM and low-income students more heavily than other students (University of California Office of the President, 2020). Not long after the suspension, the Regents of the University of California decided to permanently eliminate the standardized tests requirement with no end date (University of California Office of the President, 2022b). However, while UC's freshman applications and admissions data for the first two years after UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement indicate that the policy reform enabled all students without standardized tests to apply and get accepted to UC campuses, it is still unclear how the policy reform will long-term impact URM students and reflect higher education equity in UC admissions system.

UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement—which attempted to advance higher education admissions equity under the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic—could bring more stress, lack of guidance, and new barriers for URM students in their college planning and application process. Therefore, this critical policy analysis research investigated

how UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement influenced the URM students' college planning and application process for fall 2022 admissions. As URM students are the primary stakeholders directly affected from UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement, sharing and analyzing their counter-stories reveals how and why the policy reform had advanced higher education equity in UC admissions system and also provides implications and strategies for further higher education admission policies' development and implementation.

### **Research Questions**

To prepare for the SAT/ACT test, high school students—especially underrepresented minority students (URM)—need to arrange additional time and energy for test preparation. Many of these students require specialized test preparation resources to achieve high scores. UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement has opened the doors for four-year college education to students who do not have the resources to prepare for and access standardized tests, as indicated by the increased numbers of URM freshman UC applicants and admissions for fall 2021 and fall 2022 (University of California Office of the President, 2022c; 2022d). However, the opportunities to apply and the admission selectivity increased for most ethnic and racial groups among the URM students, and inequity among URM and non-URM students still existed—as reflected by the overall higher freshman admissions rates than those of URM students (University of California Office of the President, 2022d). The effectiveness of UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement in considering higher education admissions equity remains unclear. The URM freshman applicants' experiences and perspectives of the college planning and application for UC's selective, four-year universities can indicate the effectiveness and influences of UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement. The

research questions of this study were developed to learn about these URM students' experiences and perceptions:

1. What are the college planning and application experiences of URM students after UC eliminated the standardized tests requirement in its freshman admissions?
2. What are URM students' perceptions of higher education equity as a result of UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement in its freshman admissions?

### **Research Design and Methodology**

This qualitative research was a critical policy analysis of a recent higher education admissions policy and its influence on a group of URM students in California. It used phenomenological approaches to make meaning of URM students' lived experiences and perceptions of the college planning and application process after UC eliminated the standardized tests requirement for fall 2021 to fall 2024 admissions within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic (Creswell, 2013). Adopting a theoretical framework of CRT tenets—normality of racism, the social construction of racism, counter storytelling, intersectionality, interest convergence, and internalized oppression theory—this critical policy analysis identified emergent themes and discussed higher education equity of UC admissions system from the URM student participants' experiences and perceptions (Axner, n.d.; Crenshaw, 1995; David, 2013; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Matsuda et al., 1993).

The study recruited 14 URM participants who applied for UC as freshman applicants for fall 2022, the second year after UC eliminated the standardized tests requirement. Each purposefully selected participant filled out a demographic survey and joined a 45-minute interview where they were asked questions about their perspectives and experiences of the

college planning and application, UC's admissions policy reform, standardized tests, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Seven—or half of the participants—attended a focus-group discussion before the follow-up interviews, which were used to improve interview protocols based on the emergent themes of the focus groups. Then, through three phases of data analysis, four themes are consolidated and analyzed from the CRT tenets and internalized oppression theory: (a) Insidiousness of Higher Education Racism: The Role of Standardized Testing in Admissions, (b) Internalized Oppression of the Legitimization of the Standardized Tests Requirement, (c) Intersectionality of Race, Income, First-Generation College Students, and Pandemic Experience, and (d) URM Students' Increased Trust in UC's Admissions System.

Findings are presented through counter-storytelling. For each theme, significant quotes from URM student participants are presented, interpreted, and analyzed to discuss the essence of the central phenomenon from the common lived experiences of the URM students after UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement and how they reflect the complexity of higher education equity advancement in the admissions system.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This critical policy analysis research sought to provide counter-narratives, understand, and interpret the URM students' college planning and application experiences immediately after UC eliminated the standardized tests requirement and their perceptions towards four-year higher education admissions and its equity. From analyzing information collected from surveys, focus groups, and interviews of a group of URM students, this research discussed how and why the policy reform has—or has not—advanced higher education equity in UC admissions and identified the removed, alleviated, emerged, and persisting barriers during the URM students'

college planning and application process after the policy reform and in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

On the one hand, the study provided policy implications and strategies for UC and other state and private elite universities to advance higher education admissions equity in the post-COVID-19 pandemic era. On the other hand, the untold stories of URM students revealed their needs and pointed to potential practices and programs for educators, counselors, administrators, and policymakers in secondary and higher education systems; the goal of such programs being to help URM students navigate the college planning and application process after UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement and further enroll in and complete bachelor's degrees in selective, four-year higher education.

### **Significance of the Study**

This critical policy analysis research explored how and why UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement has—or has not—advanced higher education equity and influenced URM students in telling counter-stories and interpreting their perspectives and experiences. While the policy making process considered the voices of all stakeholders—including professors, researchers, administrators, and student representatives—the immediate influences of eliminating a long-held admissions requirement were worth investigating. Undoubtedly, UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement considered higher education admissions equity and has since attempted to increase four-year college education access for the URM students. However, the significance of this study is grounded in the overall lack of exploration of individual URM students' experiences and perceptions of the policy reform's implementation.

The study also explored the complexity of a selective, four-year higher education admissions system and provided recommendations for policies and programs for advancing higher education equity, thus adding to its significance. Finding a balance between equity and equality has always been a challenging process for many policy making situations. Although URM students' UC application and admissions numbers increased consecutively from fall 2020 to fall 2022, all students' UC application and admissions numbers also increased. Additionally, the admissions and enrollment rates for URM students are still lower than those for all students, indicating the continuous existence of inequity in UC's higher education admissions (University of California Office of the President, 2022d). Therefore, the challenge of interpreting whether UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement can effectively advance equity in the long term remains in place. Studying URM students' perspectives and experiences could contribute to answering this question and reveal the complexity of higher education equity advancement and persisting barriers faced by URM students to accessing selective, four-year higher education.

Finally, the study significantly contributes to the general study of critical policy analysis and the movement of critical race theory (CRT). The study critically examined the immediate effects of a policy that was developed in consideration of advancing equity through the lenses of CRT. Indeed, many policies have been initiated with the intention to address specific challenges of different populations or to alleviate systematic issues; however, the actual and immediate effects and influences of these policies on the stakeholders were worth studying and evaluating, given the complexity and interconnectedness of the components in our society and the assumptions that race and racism are permanent, ordinary, and socially constructed (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015).

## Theoretical Framework

American colonists founded the first few higher education institutions in the United States during the colonial period. Only White Christian males were allowed to enroll and study at these colleges, while White women and Black students were denied their right to attend higher education (Staff Writers, 2021). During the “common-school movement” of the 1830s, women’s opportunities for education and employment were expanded for them to become financially independent and support their families. Until the “Age of the University”—from the 1870s to 1910s—the federal government expanded opportunities for Black students to access higher education through grants and legislation, such as the *Morrill Act* (1890; National Archives, 2022).

Although higher education institutions claim to value equity, diversity, and inclusivity in the 21st century, the effects of race and racism continue in society and higher education under this historical background (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015; Patton, 2016; Patton et al., 2007). Thus, this critical policy analysis research used critical race theory as the theoretical framework and further integrated theories of internalized oppression to analyze long-term, multi-layered oppression experienced by the URM student participants.

First, the tenet of experiential knowledge through counter-storytelling inspired the research design of this study (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Matsuda et al., 1993; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). The counter-stories of URM students provided unique experiential knowledge and insights into issues of higher education equity through admissions systems; they also point to further policies and practices to advance higher education equity. The tenets of normality and permanence of racism, the social construction of racism and intersectionality, combined with



internalized oppression theories, were used in data analysis to critically explore the effects of UC Regents Policy 2013's reform (Crenshaw, 1995; David, 2013; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Matsuda et al., 1993; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). Finally, the tenet of interest convergence was used to compare the data analysis results about URM students—with overall admissions and enrollment results of all students, including White students—to further discuss the complexity of equity in higher education admissions (Bell, 1995a; 1995b).

### **Definition of Terms**

The definitions are presented in the order of which the terms appear in the dissertation.

#### **Underrepresented Minority Students/URM students**

Underrepresented minority students, or URM students refers to three of the categories that are underrepresented overall among domestic students in U.S. higher education: Hispanic (Latinx), Black, and Native American (American Indian) (Bleemer, 2020). In this study, I extended the definition of underrepresented minority students to include undocumented immigrants—or DACA students—as they share similar barriers in the college planning and application process (Perez, 2015).

#### **First-Generation College Students**

The University of California defines a first-generation college student as “a student where neither parent nor guardian has earned a four-year college degree” (University of California Information Center, 2022b). As a critical policy analysis of UC's admissions policy reform, this research study applied UC's definition of a first-generation college student throughout the research design, data collection, analysis, and conclusion.

## **Low-Income Students**

For the sake of the study, I adopted the same definition of a low-income student as the one defined by UC: “Those who qualify for Pell Grants (federal aid awarded to students from families with household incomes of \$50,000 or less)” (UC Newsroom, 2014). The demographic data collection of a participant’s income status aligned with this definition and each participant was asked whether they qualified for or received Pell Grants.

## **Higher Education Equity**

The federal government’s Equity Action Plan, executed by the U.S. Department of Education, has sought to address the long-term disparities that underserved students and communities have faced to achieve equal educational opportunities (The White House, n.d.; U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). The UC Board of Regents Diversity Statement emphasized the core mission of the University of California to “seek to achieve diversity among its student bodies and employees” and recognized “the acute need to remove barriers to the recruitment, retention, and advancement of talented students, faculty, and staff from historically excluded populations who are currently underrepresented” (University of California Board of Regents, 2020; University of California Office of the General Counsel, 2015). Thus, for this qualitative study, I integrated the federal, state, and UC’s mission statements related to equity: Equal higher education opportunity through removing barriers and addressing long-term disparities faced by underrepresented minority students.”

## **Selectivity**

Higher education institutions accept anywhere from under 10% to over 90% of their freshman applicants; the lower the acceptance rate of a higher education institution, the more

selective the institution is considered (Clinedinst, 2019). Different organizations, college counseling programs, and consultancy agencies define the level of selectivity differently. What is commonly agreed upon is that selectivity can be defined by either an institution’s acceptance rate or admission rate. According to the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) and authors of the book *Admission Matters*—one of the guiding books in the college counseling industry—a very-selective institution is defined as one with an admission rate of lower than 50%, and a moderately-selective institution accepts 50% or more of their applicants (Clinedinst, 2019; Springer et al., 2017). Further, a highly selective institution admits less than 35% of its applicants (Springer et al., 2017).

As this research only studied the freshman admission policy reform and URM students’ experiences as freshman applicants, the selectivity of the nine UC campuses was defined based on the campuses’ freshman admission rates, as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Admissions Rates and Selectivity Level of UC Campuses*

UC Campus	Freshman Admission Rate of Fall 2021	Freshman Admission Rate of Fall 2022	Selectivity Level
UC Los Angeles	10.8%	8.6%	Highly selective
UC Berkeley	14.5%	11.3%	Highly selective
UC Irvine	28.8%	21.1%	Highly selective
UC Santa Barbara	29.2%	25.8%	Highly selective
UC San Diego	34.2%	23.7%	Highly selective
UC Davis	48.7%	37.3%	Very selective
UC Santa Cruz	58.6%	46.8%	Moderately (2021) /Very (2022) selective
UC Riverside	65.4%	68.7%	Moderately selective
UC Merced	86.6%	89.5%	Moderately selective

*Note.* Adapted from *Table 2.1 University of California Freshman Admissions by Campus and Race/Ethnicity Fall 2020, 2021, and 2022 [Data Set]* by University of California Office of the President, 2022d, copyright 2023 by University of California Office of the President, Graduate, Undergraduate and Equity Affairs, Admissions.

Among the nine UC campuses, there are five considered to be highly selective schools: UC Los Angeles, UC Berkeley, UC Santa Barbara, UC Irvine, and UC San Diego. UC Davis and

UC Santa Cruz are very-selective institutions based on their freshman admissions rates for fall 2022, and the other two campuses are moderately selective.

### **College Planning**

College planning often involves exploring learning interests, finding personal goals for college and career, and academic planning—such as selecting courses at school, attending summer programs and extracurriculars, preparing and taking standardized tests, visiting schools, etc. (College Transitions, n.d.). The terms “College Planning” and “College Preparation” are interchangeably used when discussing topics related to college or postsecondary education, both in academia and professional fields of secondary education, postsecondary education, and college counseling. Sometimes, “college preparation” only refers to academic preparation or preparation for standardized tests, such as the SAT/ACT or AP exams. Therefore, I used “college planning” to describe all the components and actions related to an individual’s college aspirations and application. The college planning process can start as early as pre-high school and can last until the start of the college application process, which typically occurs at the end of the third year or the beginning of the fourth year in high school.

### **College Application**

College application is “the process by which individuals apply to gain entry into a college or university” (College Application, 2022). Typically, the college application process of a student in the United States starts after their completion of the third year or at the beginning of the fourth year of high school. The submission period of college application materials starts from the first of August before a student starts their fourth year at high school to spring of that same year. During the college application process, a student will research and decide on the schools

and major programs to apply for, prepare materials required by the universities—such as transcripts, standardized tests reports, recommendation letters, college application essays, art portfolios, etc.—and submit these materials by the application deadline (BigFuture, n.d.). The college application process can also include applications for financial aid and scholarships. The UC system opens its fall application on the first of August, and the nine campuses' submission deadline is November 30th. Each student is only required to complete one online application that is then used for all nine campuses (University of California, n.d.). A college application process reaches completion when the student is accepted to at least one college and decides on attendance.

### **UC's Comprehensive Review**

The Regents of the University of California developed the Guidelines for Implementation of University Policy on Undergraduate Admissions to specify the 14 factors that individual UC campuses should consider for their comprehensive review process in their undergraduate admissions, including GPA, advanced courses number and performance, ELC eligibility, performance related to educational opportunities in secondary school, specific academic subject performance and projects, unique talents and achievements, life experiences, special circumstances, location, etc. (University of California Office of the President, 2019). Updated in 2019, this document specifies 14 selection criteria for UC freshman applicants. However, current UC comprehensive review guidelines only consider 13 selection criteria, excluding the standardized tests requirement (University of California Office of the President, 2019).

## **Limitations**

Given the time constraints of this study, which took about seven months for participant recruitment, data collection, data analysis, and writing, I used the non-probability sampling method. There may be biases in the findings of this study because the participants were only recruited from those who used the specific social platform—Instagram ([www.instagram.com](http://www.instagram.com))—and were active online. Another limitation could be found within the scale of this study, which only explored the influences of one of many of UC’s freshman admissions policy reforms—UC Regents Policy 2103’s reform of suspending the standardized tests requirement (University of California Office of the President, 2022a). UC implemented other admissions policy reforms during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, such as accepting “pass/no pass” grades for students who took distance learning during the pandemic for their high school transcript requirement for fall 202; however, this study did not examine the effects of these other policy reforms—or the combined effects of the suspension of the standardized tests requirement—on the URM students’ college planning and application process and higher education equity in UC admissions (University of California Office of the President, 2020).

## **Delimitations**

Considering the limitations stated above, this critical policy analysis only studied the case of UC’s elimination of the standardized tests requirement and did not develop references of the policy impact on other public university systems that have suspended or abandoned the standardized tests requirements, such as that of California State University system or private elite universities. The findings and conclusions about the influences of UC’s elimination of the standardized tests requirement on higher education admissions equity were not generalized to

implicate policy impact or higher education equity advancement of other universities that adopt a similar policy of the standardized tests requirements; instead, they were used to discuss effective policies and practices that further support URM students in California to access, enroll, and complete selective, four-year higher education and to examine the complexity of higher education equity advancement in UC admissions system.

### **Assumptions**

Throughout this study, the researcher assumed that the educational resources of UC campuses are unevenly distributed. UC campuses with higher selectivity, such as UCLA and UC Berkeley, have better education resources than less-selective campuses; it was assumed that UCLA and UC Berkeley admit an extremely low portion of their applicants because of the scarcity of their high-quality educational resources, such as faculty and labs. Therefore, if there was a trend that more URM students enroll in highly selective UC campuses after UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement, it meant that URM students had more access to selective, four-year higher universities which have higher-quality resources than non-selective four-year higher education or community colleges.

Other assumptions of this research were the fundamental beliefs about racism. The researcher's beliefs and understanding of racism in society and higher education aligned with the CRT literature and scholarship discussed in the section on the theoretical framework: permanence and ordinariness of racism, the social construction of race and racism, experiential knowledge of people of color, and interest convergence principle (Bell, 1995a; 1995b; Crenshaw, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Matsuda et al., 1993; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015).

## **Conclusion**

This critical policy analysis research explored the immediate effects of an unprecedented admissions policy reform—UC’s elimination of the standardized tests requirement—from the perspectives and experiences of a group of URM freshman students. The following chapters are organized as indicated: Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature on critical race theory, the history of U.S. higher education, URM students’ barriers and internalized oppression in college planning and application process, UC admissions policy and its standardized tests requirement, and student perceptions and experiences under education policy reforms. Chapter 3 elaborates on the research design, theoretical framework, participation selection and recruitment, data collection methods, instrument construction, and three data analysis phases. Chapter 4 first presents the demographic survey results of the 14 URM student participants. It then describes and interprets their experiences and perceptions after UC eliminated the standardized tests requirement and higher education equity with the support of significant quotes. The data analysis and findings are presented surrounding four emergent themes: (a) Insidiousness of Higher Education Racism: The Role of Standardized Testing in Admissions, (b) Internalized Oppression of the Legitimization of the Standardized Tests Requirement, (c) Intersectionality of Race, Income, First-Generation College Students, and Pandemic Experience, and (d) URM Students’ Increased Trust in UC’s Admissions System. Chapter 5 discusses findings and emphasizes four unexpected topics:

1. Improving College Access for URM students: A Multi-Player Support System
2. Four-Year Higher Education Enrollment and Success After the Policy Reform
3. Addressing Long-Term Disparities in Secondary Education System



#### 4. UC's Counter-Action of Proposition 209 and the Supreme Court's Rulings in 2023

Finally, this critical policy analysis research concludes on the effects of UC's elimination of the standardized tests through the lens of higher education interest convergence in the post-COVID-19 pandemic era and provides implication for future policy, practices, and research direction for UC's higher education admissions equity advancement.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This literature review begins with a review of the fundamental tenets of critical race theory (CRT) and discussion on how the tenets were employed in this critical policy analysis research. Then, the chapter provides a review of the literature in five parts. The first part compares the traditional policy analysis with critical policy analysis approaches and builds a foundation for understanding this research's design and theoretical framework. The second part provides a comparison of higher education admissions' historical background and trends before and after affirmative action from the national and state levels. The third part identifies the URM students' barriers during the college planning and application process and effective practices and programs to help overcome these barriers. Fourth, the review explores UC's admission policies and actions for supporting the URM students' access to UC education and summarizes the studies that have evaluated these policies and practices which indicate that standardized tests negatively influence the effectiveness of these policies and practices. Therefore, the line is traced from the history of UC's adoption of standardized tests for its admissions consideration, review the critiques of standardized tests for college entrance, and summarize the rationale of UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement. Lastly, a review of previous studies that have sought to understand students' perceptions and experiences of school policy reforms related to standardized tests or higher education policies is provided.

#### **Critical Policy Analysis**

Traditional policy analysis (TPA) in educational research identifies influential factors and considers the planning, implementation, evaluation, changes and reforms, economics efficiency

and outcomes of an educational policy (Young, 1999; 2018; Young & Diem, 2014). TPA assumes the rationality and capabilities of understanding the necessary knowledge for policy making and evaluation (Young & Diem, 2017). However, since the 1980s, a few critical policy analysis (CPA) scholars have questioned the rational approaches of TPA. CPA considered the role of power and empirical research for educational policy evaluation and development, and adopted critical frameworks for questioning epistemology, policy making and implementation process, power dynamic, accountabilities, and various stakeholders involved in an educational policy making and implementation process (Apple, 1982; 2019; Ball, 1991; 1993; 1994; Popkewitz, 1997; Young & Diem, 2017). Additionally, some CPA scholars have engaged in social activism and proposed practical solutions through policy reform, advocacy, and leadership at school, district, and government levels (Diem & Young, 2015; Young, 2018).

This study applied CPA to critically examine the implementation and effectiveness of UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement for freshman admissions. Derived from a review of the history and epistemology of UC's admissions policy regarding standardized tests, the research explored the policy effectiveness by learning about lived experiences of the stakeholders who were supposed to be the major beneficiaries of the policy implementation. Based on these data, the study further analyzed the policy effects in terms of higher education and admissions equity for URM students and those with intersectional underrepresented identities—such as low-income, undocumented immigrants, language learners, first-generation college students, etc. This critical analysis process involved critical race theory tenets, internalized oppression, and funds of knowledge. The following sections elaborate on how this CPA and these theoretical frameworks are interlocked.

## **Critical Race Theory**

This critical policy analysis applied a few tenets of critical race theory (CRT) as its theoretical framework to explore the influences of UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement on URM students' college planning and application process and on higher education admissions equity in UC campuses. The following sub-sections elaborate on how specific tenets were utilized in this research.

### **Normality and Permanence of Racism**

In their introduction to critical race theory, Delgado and Stefancic (2017) identified the basic tenets of CRT. The first tenet is the normality of Racism. They argued that "Race is ordinary, not aberrational—normal science,' the usual way society does business, the common, everyday experience of most people of color in this country" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p.8). The normality of racism was reflected in the historical background and has continued to be reflected in today's higher education system—from the limitation of race, gender, and religion of individuals to attaining higher education to the underrepresentation of URM students in the entirety of the higher education system. In examining the past two decades of the CRT movement in higher education, McCoy and Rodricks (2015) defined this tenet in higher education as "Permanence of Racism—the concept that racism is not random and isolated but is an endemic and permanent aspect of People of Color's experiences in the United States" (p. viii). Ever since the creation of affirmative action in 1960s, many selective, four-year higher education institutions have developed complex policies and rules that emphasize comprehensive or holistic review, but still marginalize and hinder URM students from accessing and completing higher education. This critical policy analysis research examined specifically how UC's elimination of

the standardized tests requirement removed one of the admissions rules that contributed to the permanence of racism and excluded URM students—especially those who were low-income students—from accessing selective, four-year universities, such as UC campuses.

### **Social Construction of Racism**

Delgado and Stefancic (2017) pointed out the social construction thesis as another tenet of CRT. The thesis, as they explained, reveals that although an individual's physical traits—such as skin color—only make up a fractional portion of genes compared with their personality, intelligence, and behaviors, this scientific fact or genetic reality is often ignored; instead, race and racism become “products of social thought and relations” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p.9). Mainstream society has constructed race and racism as categories wherein individuals can be placed. This critical policy analysis research investigated how UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement can break the negative, socially constructed discourses and perceptions of URM students regarding their standardized testing performance, college readiness, entrance, and success in selective, four-year universities.

### **Experiential Knowledge Through Counter-Storytelling**

Several authors have emphasized the importance of the CRT tenet of counter-storytelling. Delgado and Stefancic (2017) argued that “[m]uch of what we believe is ridiculous, self-serving, or cruel but is not perceived to be so at the time. Attacking embedded preconceptions that marginalize others or conceal their humanity is a legitimate function of all fiction” (p. 50). Individuals have been challenged by this argument to critically reflect on their own assumptions and self-interested behaviors that could attack and marginalize others; it suddenly became crucial to listen to and examine the beliefs, perceptions, and experiences of marginalized others in order

to understand the ridicule and cruelty of these individuals who currently benefit from its operating systems.

Matsuda et al. (1993), when defining elements of CRT, emphasized one element as recognizing the significance of experiential knowledge of people of color, which could be gained from critical reflection on their lived experience of racism and practices of eliminating racism. McCoy and Rodricks (2015) further redefined this tenet directly as “Experiential Knowledge,” which acknowledges the value, legitimacy, and necessity of understanding lived experience of people of color in analyzing racial subordination and systematic oppression in education, and counter-storytelling is one way to share this knowledge.

Following these definitions and beliefs, this critical policy analysis sought to relay and make meaning of the counter-stories of URM students’ college planning and application experience, as well as their perceptions of higher education admissions, success, and equity after UC’s elimination of the standardized tests requirement. Although the policy reform was developed in consideration of the perspectives of policymakers, faculty, and students of diverse backgrounds, whether the policy reform’s implementation has served UC’s mission to increase diversity and advance equity during the COVID-19 pandemic cannot just be determined by the statistical numbers of UC admissions. The counter-stories of these URM students—who were directly and immediately influenced by the policy reform’s implementation—provides both an over-arching narrative for the “marginalized others” and a critical analysis of the effectiveness of the policy reform and future policies in the name of higher education equity advancement.

## **Intersectionality**

Matsuda et al. (1993) described another defining element of CRT as “eliminating racial oppression as part of the broader goal of ending all forms of oppression” (p. 6). They recognized the intersecting forms of oppression and subordination based on gender, class, or sexual orientation and emphasized that only multidimensional consciousness and practices could eliminate the multi-layered oppression (Matsuda et al., 1993). Crenshaw (1995) identified the “unique vulnerability of women of color to these converging systems of domination” while investigating the political intersectionality of gender and race in rape (p. 367).

These studies and theories of multiple forms of oppression experienced by people with intersectional identities inspired the researcher to explore the effect of UC’s elimination of the standardized tests requirement on multiple forms of oppression experienced by URM students with intersectional identities based on class and parent background; precisely, URM students who are low-income and/or first-generation college students. Based on the literature surrounding intersectionality, this critical policy analysis assumed that URM students with intersectional identities of low-income and/or first-generation college student were uniquely more vulnerable to the multiple forms of systematic oppression of higher education admissions than URM students who are neither low-income nor first-generation (Crenshaw, 1995; Matsuda et al., 1993).

Furthermore, Delgado and Stefancic (2017) described the CRT tenet of intersectionality from perspectivism: “Perspectivism, the insistence on examining how things look from the perspective of individual actors, helps us understand the predicament of intersectional individuals. It can enable us to frame approaches that may do justice to a broad range of people

and avoid oversimplifying human experience” (pp. 62-63). Therefore, only through understanding the perspectives and experiences of the URM students with intersectional identities can researchers address—through policy and practice—the unique vulnerability and multi-dimensional oppression towards these students in the U.S. higher education admissions system.

### **Interest Convergence**

Derrick Bell (1995b) proposed the principle of interest convergence when he analyzed legal cases after *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954): “The interest of blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interests of whites” (p. 22). Regarding the consequences of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) legislation, Bell (1995b) examined that the desegregation legislation was ineffective in majority-Black areas and where the schools and districts have been underfunded and/or massively lack educational resources. The legislation could become detrimental to students of color in terms of accessing sufficient educational resources. Therefore, Bell (1995b) articulated that “racial remedies may instead be the outwards manifestations of unspoken and perhaps subconscious judicial conclusions that the remedies, if granted, will secure the advance, or at least not harm societal interests deemed important by middle-and upper-class whites. Racial justice—or its appearance—may, from time to time, be counted among the interests deemed important by the courts and by society’s policymakers” (p.22). The interest convergence principle also applied to this critical policy analysis. The data analysis and research findings relayed counter-stories of the URM students’ college planning and application experiences after UC eliminated the standardized tests requirement and students’ positive attitudes towards accessing selective, four-year higher



education. However, the research methods omitted the effects of the policy reform on White students.

Following the interest convergence principle, this critical policy analysis examined whether the policy reform benefits the status quo by analyzing and comparing White students' UC application, admissions, and enrollment data before and after UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement with those of URM students.

### **History of U.S. Higher Education**

American colonists founded the first few higher education institutions in the United States during the colonial period. Only White Christian males were allowed to enroll and study at these colleges, while White women and Black students were denied their right to higher education (Staff Writers, 2021). During the Common School Movement in the 19th century, the idea that “publicly supported schools could and should exist for all children” was instigated (Kaestle, 1983). The first free public schools were built and funded to provide education for women, students from low socioeconomic status, and/or with non-Christian religious affiliations. However, these schools were only open to White children. It was not until and after the Reconstruction Era that the federal government became involved and expanded educational opportunities for Black students; they established public schools in the former slave-holding states that enrolled Black students and eventually increased the higher education access of Black students through grants and legislation, such as the 15th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution: Voting Rights (U.S. Const. amend. XV.) and the *Morrill Act of 1890* (National Archives, 2022).

In the history of U.S. education, higher education institutions fell behind elementary and secondary schools in advancing equity among students of all backgrounds. In 1980, the U.S.

Department of Education (ED) was established by Congress in the *Department of Education Organization Act* (1979). According to ED, higher education institutions aim to “promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access” (n.d.). Given the historical background, race and racism still exist in society and higher education after more than a century—Latinx, Black, and Native Americans students are still underrepresented and marginalized in today’s U.S. higher education system (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015; Patton, 2016; Patton et al., 2007). To increase higher education access for URM students, secondary schools, higher education institutions, and state and national departments of education still have several boxes that require checking.

As specified in Chapter 1, individuals with bachelor’s degrees have had—on average—higher annual and lifelong earnings and better living conditions than individuals with high school diplomas; some college education, rather than a four-year college education, does not make much difference for individuals with high school diplomas (Baum et al., 2013; National Center for Education Statistics, 2023; United States Census Bureau, 2021). Given the increasing demand for bachelor’s degrees in the U.S. labor market, higher education institutions have become more selective and the goal of “equal access” has been questioned (United States Census Bureau, 2021). Therefore, the factors to ensure equity in acceptance into four-year higher education have become a challenging question for these institutions.

### **Affirmative Action**

In 1961, President Kennedy issued Executive Order 10925 which mandated Affirmative Action—a series of laws, policies, and practices—to address the historical underrepresentation and discrimination based on race and gender in the U.S. workforce and education system

(Fullinwider, 2018; Kennedy, 1961). In July 1964, President Johnson signed the *Civil Rights Act of 1964* wherein the federal government outlawed discrimination in public employment and education and mandated that federally assisted programs and public college should not “deny admissions or not permit an individual to continue in attendance by reason of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin” (Civil Rights Act, 1964).

TITLE IV of the *Civil Rights Act of 1964* mandated desegregation of public education, which involved all public colleges operated by states, subdivisions of a state, or government agencies, while TITLE VII mandated Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) and prohibited discrimination in employment. The *Civil Rights Act of 1964* also ruled that ordering affirmative action in relief of discrimination in public employment and education would be legal under TITLE VII. Not long after, the *Higher Education Act of 1965* was approved. One of its most meaningful legislations was the establishment of federal Pell Grants under TITLE IV, which awarded only undergraduate students with financial needs for attending college (Higher Education Act, 1965). In 1974, the *Equal Educational Opportunities Act* was established by the federal government. The law prohibited racial segregation and sought to ensure equal participation of students from all backgrounds by taking appropriate action, such as transportation, bilingual education, etc. The EEOA defined the appropriate action and allowed universities to take such action to allocate grants and funding from the government to support underrepresented students in higher education. Such legislation made universities and colleges—both public and private—“contractors” of the federal government because of the requirement to allocate grants to support underrepresented students and ensure equal participation of students from all backgrounds.

In 1978, the historic case *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* (1978) ruled that while affirmative action served the state interest of creating a diverse class under the 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution (U.S. Const. amend. XIV.), but that the racial quota for higher education institutions admissions was unconstitutional (*Regents of University of California v. Bakke*, 1978). However, the unearned preferences of individuals for higher education or employment opportunities based on race and gender raised questions about another form of discrimination against White people. Therefore, as of today, nine states have banned affirmative action: California (1996), Washington (1998), Florida (1999), Michigan (2006), Nebraska (2008), Arizona (2010), New Hampshire (2012), Oklahoma (2012), and Idaho (2020) (Brunner & Rowen, 2022; Potter, 2014).

California was the first state that banned affirmative action. In 1996, the *California Civil Rights Initiative* (Proposition 209, 1996) was passed with 54.55% voting “YES,” which added an amendment to the California Constitution’s Declaration of Rights and banned the state’s ability to discriminate against or grant preferences in public employment, education, and contracting based on an individual’s race, sex, color, ethnicity, or national origin (Ballotpedia, n.d.-a). One of the key supporters of the Amendment, Republican Governor Pete Wilson, held that the affirmative action of enforcing equal opportunities for women and ethnic minority people was itself unjust and discriminatory (Proposition 209, 1996).

### **Post-Affirmative Action in California**

The *California Civil Rights Initiative* (Proposition 209, 1996) was passed, but the elimination of affirmative action for college and university admissions remained controversial, considering the state of California’s goal of providing universal education and elevating equity

for historically underrepresented students. Table 3 displays a timeline of laws and legislations of affirmative action that influence the State of California:

**Table 3**

*Affirmative Action Legislations Timeline in California*

Year	Laws and Legislation	Statements of the Laws
1961	President Kennedy's Executive Order 10925	"The contractor will not discriminate against any employee or applicant for employment because of race, creed, color, or national origin. The contractor will take affirmative action to ensure that applicants are employed, and that employees are treated during employment, without regard to their race, creed, color, or national origin" (Kennedy, 1961).
1964	<i>Civil Rights Act of 1964</i>	"No person in the United States shall, on the ground of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance" (Civil Rights Act, 1964). "Program or activity" and "program" defined . . . (2) (A) a college, university, or other postsecondary institution, or a public system of higher education" (Civil Rights Act, 1964).
1965	<i>Higher Education Act (1965)</i>	One of its most meaningful legislations is its establishment of federal Pell Grants under TITLE IV, which awards only undergraduate students with financial needs to attend college. Such legislation has made universities and colleges, both public and private, "contractors" of the federal government, because private universities also enroll students who rely on Pell Grants to attend higher education (Higher Education Act, 1965).
1978	Case Law: <i>Regents of the University of California v. Bakke (1978)</i>	The U.S. Supreme Court's ruling on June 28, 1978, declared affirmative action constitutional, but the use of racial quotas of the programs unconstitutional.
1996	Passing of the <i>California Civil Rights Initiative (Proposition 209, 1996)</i>	"The state cannot discriminate against or grant preferential treatment on the basis of race, sex, color, ethnicity, or national origin in the operation of public employment, public education, and public contracting" (Proposition 209, 1996).

*Note.* Adapted from Civil Rights Act of 1964, Pub. L. No. 88-352, 78 Stat. 241. (1964). <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-Note>. Civil Rights Act of 1964, Pub. L. No. 88-352, 78 Stat. 241, 1964, Higher Education Act of 1965, Pub. L. No. 89-329 H.R.5961, 117th Cong, 1965, <https://www.govinfo.gov/app/details/COMPS-765>, copyright 2022 by U.S. Government Publishing Office; Regents of University of California v. Bakke, 438 U.S. 265, 1978, <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/438/265/>, copyright 2023 by Justia; J. F. Kennedy, 1961, March 6, Executive Order 10925—Establishing the President's Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity, *The American Presidency Project*, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/executive-order-10925-establishing-the-presidents-committee-equal-employment-opportunity>, copyright 2023 by the American Presidency Project; Proposition 209: Text of Proposed Law, 1996, California Secretary of State, <https://vigarchive.sos.ca.gov/1996/general/pamphlet/209text.htm>, copyright 2023 by California Secretary of State; Secretary of State, 2020, Assembly Constitutional Amendment No. 5: CHAPTER 23, *California Legislative Information*, [https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill\\_id=201920200ACA5](https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=201920200ACA5), copyright 2020 by California Office of Legislative Counsel; Senate Constitutional Amendment No. 5, Cal. Legis, 2021.

**Table 3 (Continued)**

*Affirmative Action Legislations Timeline in California*

Year	Laws and Legislation	Statements of the Laws
2014	Passing and withdrawal of Senate Constitutional Amendment No. 5, Cal. (2021)	“WHEREAS, Proposition 209 [1996] has had a devastating impact on minority equal opportunity and access to California’s publicly funded institutions of higher education. This violates the spirit of the California Master Plan for Higher Education by making it more difficult for many students to obtain an affordable and accessible high quality public education. While federal law allows schools to use race as a factor when making admissions decisions, California universities are prohibited by Proposition 209 from engaging in targeted outreach and extra efforts to matriculate high-performing minority students. This reduces the graduation rates of students of color and, in turn, contributes to the diminution of the “pipeline” of candidates of color for faculty positions” (Secretary of State, 2020).
2020	Defeat of California Proposition 16 (2020)	“Without Proposition 209 [1996], the state government, local governments, public universities, and other political subdivisions and public entities would—within the limits of federal law—be allowed to develop and use affirmative action programs that grant preferences based on race, sex, color, ethnicity, and national origin in public employment, public education, and public contracting” (California Proposition 16, 2020; Repeal Proposition 209 Affirmative Action Amendment, 2020).

*Note.* Adapted from Civil Rights Act of 1964, Pub. L. No. 88-352, 78 Stat. 241. (1964). [https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-Note/Civil Rights Act of 1964, Pub. L. No. 88-352, 78 Stat. 241, 1964, Higher Education Act of 1965, Pub. L. No. 89-329 H.R.5961, 117th Cong. 1965, https://www.govinfo.gov/app/details/COMPS-765](https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-Note/Civil%20Rights%20Act%20of%201964/Pub.%20L.%20No.%2088-352,%2078%20Stat.%20241,%201964,%20Higher%20Education%20Act%20of%201965,%20Pub.%20L.%20No.%2089-329%20H.R.5961,%20117th%20Cong.1965,%20https://www.govinfo.gov/app/details/COMPS-765), copyright 2022 by U.S. Government Publishing Office; Regents of University of California v. Bakke, 438 U.S. 265, 1978, <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/438/265/>, copyright 2023 by Justia; J. F. Kennedy, 1961, March 6, Executive Order 10925—Establishing the President’s Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity, *The American Presidency Project*, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/executive-order-10925-establishing-the-presidents-committee-equal-employment-opportunity>, copyright 2023 by the American Presidency Project; Proposition 209: Text of Proposed Law, 1996, California Secretary of State, <https://vigarchive.sos.ca.gov/1996/general/pamphlet/209text.htm>, copyright 2023 by California Secretary of State; Secretary of State, 2020, Assembly Constitutional Amendment No. 5: CHAPTER 23, *California Legislative Information*, [https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill\\_id=20190200ACA5](https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=20190200ACA5), copyright 2020 by California Office of Legislative Counsel; Senate Constitutional Amendment No. 5, Cal. Legis, 2021.

In 2014, the Senate Constitutional Amendment No. 5 was passed to repeal the provisions of Proposition 209 (2020) and allow preferential treatment in public education to address the discrimination and disparity in opportunities faced by women and people of color (Secretary of State, 2020). However, it was withdrawn due to strong opposition: A Change.org petition was filed to have 115,000+ votes on “NO to SCA5” (*Vote No to SCA 5!*, n.d.). In November 2020, California Proposition 16 (2020)—the Repeal Proposition 209 Affirmative Action Amendment—was introduced by Assemblyman Shirley Weber, who stated that “the ongoing [coronavirus] pandemic, as well as recent tragedies of police violence, is forcing Californians to

acknowledge the deep-seated inequality and far-reaching institutional failures that show that your race and gender still matter” (Ballotpedia, n.d.-b). With 57% of the votes “NO” on Proposition 16 (2020), UC Regents Chair, John Perez, stated that “the failure of Proposition 16 means barriers will remain in place to the detriment of many students, families, and California at large. We will continue addressing the inescapable effects of racial and gender inequity” (Ballotpedia, n.d.-b).

The repeal of the *California Civil Rights Initiative* (Proposition 209, 1996) was introduced twice by the policymakers and legislators but failed both times. Without affirmative action, barriers to accessing four-year higher education and the long-term disparities faced by URM students still requires analysis. The following section identifies these barriers and summarizes the research on practices and programs that help URM students to overcome these barriers.

### **Underrepresented Minority Students College Planning and Application**

The history of U.S. higher education has led to the long-term disparities URM students face. The passing of *California Civil Rights Initiative* (Proposition 209, 1996) and the subsequent failure to its repeal raised questions for educators, counselors, K-12 schools, and higher education institutions in California on advancing equity and increasing college access for URM students. Thus, this section identifies the barriers to college planning and application that URM students have faced long before the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak and UC’s elimination of the standardized tests requirement; it also summarizes the research on counseling practices and programs that have helped URM students overcome these barriers.

## **URM Students' Barriers in Accessing Higher Education**

As summarized in Chapter 1, attaining a bachelor's degree, or completing a four-year higher education degree—on average can increase individuals' income and socio-economic status. The process involves first accessing and second succeeding in higher education, and this research focused on the first part; specifically, receiving acceptance to and enrolling in four-year higher education (Erisman & Looney, 2007; King, 2009). Research studies have indicated that underrepresented students in higher education include low-income students, language learners, Latinx students, Black students, Indian American students, and first-generation college students (Capizzi et al., 2017; Cook et al., 2015; Guevara-Cruz, 2018; Kim & Nuñez, 2013; King, 2009; Pérusse et al., 2017). This study aligned its definition of underrepresented minority students (URM) with these categories in that the students shared multiple identities and backgrounds regarding race, ethnicity, income/socioeconomic status, nationality and legal status, language proficiency, first-generation college attendance, and learning disability.

The intersectionality of the URM students' identities can lead to the sharing of multiple barriers to college planning among URM students. Among URM students, immigrant students have faced many barriers to accessing four-year higher education. The barriers include limited English language proficiency, work and family responsibilities, acculturation and discrimination, the stress of immigration, lack of academic preparation, and financial needs (Cook et al., 2015; Erisman & Looney, 2007). Similarly, Cook et al. (2015) studied the multiple barriers Latinx language learner students (Latinx ELL students) face to get into college: discrimination and



acculturation stress, student motivation and self-efficacy, educators' negative or low expectations towards students, and college readiness and financing. Many of these barriers are also faced by low-income and first-generation college students in the United States. Pérusse et al. (2017) found that first-generation college students may have limited resources and support from families as a result of their lack of experiences and information about college application and financial aid for U.S. higher education; low-income students also lack resources, such as tutoring and learning technology, because of their low socioeconomic status. Additionally, undocumented students are not eligible for financial aid without legal status, and they do not have the privilege of educational opportunities and resources enjoyed by students born in the United States (Perez, 2015). Such barriers brought by the legal status of undocumented immigrants have required these students to possess stronger self-determination, resilience, and work ethic to access and complete higher education (Perez, 2015).

Further, with the increasing selectivity of U.S. higher education, some school counselors have observed the increased pressure related to college planning for all students, along with more stress, anxiety, fear, and/or exhaustion. According to the Princeton Review's (2022) survey of 14,148 college applicants and parents in 2022, 74% of the students and parents evaluated their stress level about the college application process as "Very high" or "High." With the increased selectivity of the elite four-year universities—such as UC schools—the stress related to college application could only become more severe. Moreover, several scholars have explored the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on high school students, indicating higher stress, anxiety, and

fear related to post-secondary education compared to before the pandemic outbreak (Yin et al., 2022; Young, 2022). The levels of stress and anxiety of URM students from increasing selectivity—combined with those caused by other barriers—during the COVID-19 pandemic were not studied by the literature.

Although UC’s elimination of the standardized tests requirement has potentially removed barriers related to standardized test preparation for URM students, how URM students’ motivation, self-efficacy, stress, and anxiety level have changed after the policy implementation are unknown. Further, no study examines how barriers faced by URM students during their college planning and application process have changed after UC eliminated the standardized tests requirement.

### **Internalized Oppression**

Given the historical background of U.S. higher education, URM students have experienced multi-generational oppression in this system. While the barriers mentioned in the previous section are explicitly faced by URM students, the internalized oppression theory indicates that URM students have also been subject to long-term internalized oppression, which can be similarly devastating (Axner, n.d.). David (2013) pointed out that “based on postcolonial theory, experiencing oppression over lifetimes and generations can lead individuals to internalize the messages of inferiority they receive about their group membership” (p. 8). URM students, as designed by this research, are Latinx, Black, and Native American students. These students come from both historically and contemporarily oppressed groups in the higher education system. David (2013) emphasized that for these student groups, “years of subjugation may have created a

general belief that their social groups are inferior to the dominant group such a belief may underline the automatic self-deprecating thoughts and behaviors that many members of oppressed groups displayed today” (p. 16). Thus, the historical and contemporary marginalization of URM students in the U.S. higher education system has ingrained in these URM students’ negative self-images and thoughts of inferiority compared to dominant groups in higher education, which are historically White males. The low self-efficacy, or imposter syndrome, of URM students towards access and succeeding in selective, four-year higher education can thus be attributed to the internalized oppression of generations-long systematic oppression of the U.S. higher education (Axner, n.d.).

Similarly, students who are low-income and first-generation college attendees are also marginalized groups who are underrepresented in the higher education system, so they have experienced another form of internalized oppression: Due to lack of financial or experiential knowledge of the family, low-income and first-generation college students are minority groups among four-year college students. They experience more barriers and uncertainties in their path of accessing and completing four-year higher education, which also leads to low self-efficacy or imposter syndrome (Axner, n.d.). David (2013) also identified that negative attitudes towards one’s social groups can lead to demotivation and negative mental health challenges, which further explains the higher anxiety, stress, and lack of motivation to apply and attend four-year higher education experienced by the URM students and those with intersectional identities.

### **College Counseling Practices and Programs that Support URM Students**

School counselors and school and community counseling programs are critical in helping high school students with college planning and application. They can advocate for students and

strive to remove college application and access barriers, especially for URM students (American School Counselor Association, 2019). However, large counselor caseloads limit students' access to their counselors. While the recommended student-counselor ratio for high schools is 250:1, the national average student-counselor ratio in 2015 was 482:1, and California's student-counselor ratio was 760:1, placing it among the highest three states (National Association for College Admission Counseling, 2019). The high student-counselor ratio raises the question of how URM students can access the necessary information and resources for their college planning and application process.

Sackett et al. (2018) applied a phenomenological approach to learn about high school students' perceptions and meaningful experiences from school counseling. The study found that the four themes of students' perceived meaningful experiences are "the relationship with school counselors, characteristics of school counselors, benefits received from school counselors, and collaboration with school counselors" (Sackett et al., 2018, p. 12). However, researchers have not yet developed or assessed counselors' practices based on the four themes.

A few practices and themes have emerged from previous studies of effective college counseling practices and programs. Militello et al. (2009) explored the effective practices of high school counselors from 18 high schools with high rates of students identified as non-White students and students eligible for TITLE I free/reduced lunch. They identified 10 themes for counselors relating to improving college access: personal characters and skills, such as leadership; time management; systems thinking; data-driven decision making; external

partnership development; and cultural building practices, such as an achievement-oriented climate, college-going culture, campus inclusivity, parent engagement, etc. (Militello et al., 2009). Johnson (2017) also developed activities of the four counseling practices based on the CARE (“cultivating strengths, acknowledging realities, removing barriers, and expanding strengths”) model for students from poverty. These activities include school-community collaboration, counseling core curriculum, small group counseling, and individual counseling/planning; among these four practices, the last three practices are led by counselors (Johnson, 2017). These studies have provided information and tools for counselors, educators, and high school administrators to support URM students to overcome barriers and access four-year higher education. Nevertheless, with higher education admission policy reforms related to standardized tests during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, researchers have not yet studied whether these practices and programs are still effective, more effective, or have evolved to adapt to these policies.

### **Funds of Knowledge**

The theory of “Funds of Knowledge” was developed from two perspectives: Lev Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory (1934) and neo-sociocultural theory, which considered human cognition, psychology, and social and historical development, and was rooted in the premise of “people are competent and have knowledge, and their life experiences have given them that knowledge” (González et al., 2005). Moll et al. (1992) defined funds of knowledge as “historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being” (p. 133). Through studying household and

classroom instruction and developing culturally responsive pedagogies, Moll et al. (2005) particularly examined how Mexican families develop social networks and how their social relationships facilitate the growth of knowledge, skills, labor, and other abilities for survival and socio-economic development (Moll & Greenberg, 1990; Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 1989). Building upon these theoretical cases of Mexican and Chicano families and communities' studies, Rios-Aguilar et al. (2011) bridged funds of knowledge and the concept of capital to generate new understandings of racial and socioeconomically underrepresented students' lives and their educational opportunities and experiences.

Since the 1990s, funds of knowledge have been recognized and studied from ethnic minority and low-income households to develop culturally responsive curricula, pedagogy, and educational leadership strategies. However, there are limited studies that explicitly apply the funds of knowledge theory to higher education attainment and college counseling programs, which involve a myriad of stakeholders and individuals who share similar racial and socioeconomic backgrounds with URM students. As stated above, Militello et al. (2009) emphasized the importance of parents' engagement, and some studies have emphasized the key roles of peers of college applicants (Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis, 2006; Ebaugh & Curry, 2000; Gibson et al., 2004; Hallinan & Williams, 1990; Tierney & Colyar, 2005). This study applied the funds of knowledge theory explicitly in Chapter 4 to analyze students' college planning and application experiences that involved their families and peers who share similar identities.

## **The University of California's Admission Policies**

Beyond college counseling programs and practices from K-12 educators and counselors, higher education institutions also seek to increase college opportunities and access for URM students. This study only focused on the case of the University of California's admission policies. Therefore, the following three subsections, review the equity advancement actions of UC in reaction to *California Civil Rights Initiative* (Proposition 209, 1996) and then summarize the studies that evaluated the effectiveness of these UC admission policies and programs on equity advancement.

### **The University of California's Admission Policies for Equity Advancement**

In response to *California Civil Rights Initiative* (Proposition 209, 1996), the University of California has adopted a few policies to advance equity, as presented in Table 4:

**Table 4**

*UC’s Admission Policies for Equity Advancement*

Year of Implementation	UC’s Admission Policies for Equity Advancement
Fall 2001	Eligibility in the Local Context (ELC) program that guarantees admissions to UC system to the top four percent of students in a high school in California (University of California Office of the President & Student Academic Services, 2002).
Fall 2002	Comprehensive review approach which lowers the weight of standardized tests and considers personal and educational circumstances (Antonovics & Backes, 2014; Atkinson & Pelfrey, 2004).
Fall 2012	Reform of the ELC program that increases the guaranteed admissions from top four percent to top nine percent of students from a high school in California (Regents of the University of California, n.d.).
Fall 2021	Reform of the Regents Policy 2103, the Policy on Undergraduate Admissions Requirements, which suspends the standardized tests requirement from fall 2021 to fall 2024 (University of California Office of the President, 2020).
Fall 2023	Permanent elimination of the standardized tests requirement in UC freshman admissions with no end date; Rescission of Regents Policy 2103, amendment of seven other Regent’s policies related to undergraduate admission requirements, and consolidation of Regents Policy 2102—Policy on Undergraduate Admissions (University of California Office of the President, 2022a; 2022b).

*Note.* Adapted from “The Effect of Banning Affirmative Action on College Admissions Policies and Student Quality”, by K. Antonovics, & B. Backes, 2014, *Journal of Human Resources*, 49(2), 295-322, copyright 2014 by University of Wisconsin Press; “Rethinking Admissions: US Public Universities in the Post-Affirmative Action Age”, by R. C. Atkinson, & P. A. Pelfrey, 2004, *The University of California Office of the President: Presidential and Scientific Papers—Richard Atkinson*, <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2w60b2x4>, Copyright 2004 by Richard C. Atkinson and Patricia A. Pelfrey; *Local Guarantee (ELC)*, by Regents of the University of California, n.d., <https://admission.universityofcalifornia.edu/admission-requirements/freshman-requirements/california-residents/local-guarantee-elc.html>, copyright by Regents of the University of California; *University of California Board of Regents Unanimously Approved Changes to Standardized Testing Requirement for Undergraduates*, by University of California Office of the President, 2020, May 21, <https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/press-room/university-california-board-regents-approves-changes-standardized-testing-requirement>, copyright 2020 by Regents of the University of California; *University of California Eligibility in the Local Context Program Evaluation Report*, by University of California Office of the President & Student Academic Services, 2002, <https://regents.universityofcalifornia.edu/regmeet/may02/304attach.pdf>, copyright 2002 by Regents of the University of California; *Attachment 6—Proposed Rescission of Regents Policy 2101—Policy on Admissions, Regents Policy 2103—Policy on Undergraduate Admissions Requirements, Regents Policy 2104—Policy on Comprehensive Review in Undergraduate Admissions, Regents Policy 2105—Policy on Undergraduate Admissions by Exception, Regents Policy 2108—Resolution Regarding Individualized Review and Holistic Evaluation in Undergraduate Admissions, and Regents Policy 2111—Policy on Academic Verification*, by University of California Office of the President, 2022a, <https://regents.universityofcalifornia.edu/regmeet/july22/a4attach6.pdf>, copyright 2022 by Regents of the University of California; *Action Item for Meeting of July 20, 2022: Amendment of Regents Policy 2110: Policy on Augmented Review in Undergraduate Admissions, Amendment and Consolidation of Regents Policy 2102: Policy on Undergraduate Admissions With Regents Policies on Admission 2101, 2103, 2104, 2105, 2108, and 2111, and Rescission of Consolidated Policies as Separate Policies*, by University of California Office of the President, 2022b, <https://regents.universityofcalifornia.edu/regmeet/july22/a4.pdf>, copyright 2022 by Regents of the University of California.

First, UC implemented the Eligibility in the Local Context (ELC) program for fall 2001 freshman admission. Through this program, high school students who have completed specific academic coursework and achieved the top four percent at their high schools are eligible for guaranteed admission to UC, but not necessarily the program or campus of the students’ choice



(University of California Office of the President & Student Academic Services, 2002).

According to University of California Office of the President, the ELC program sought to foster a college-going culture in schools that typically do not send many high school graduates to UC and give opportunities to students who succeed academically in their high school (University of California Office of the President & Student Academic Services, 2002). The policy was increased to the top nine percent so that students from underserved communities were granted access to UC's higher education for fall 2012 onward (University of California Board of Regents, 2008; University of California Office of the President, 2021).

The second admissions policy that UC changed focuses on the weights of standardized testing and high school GPA. Since fall 2002, UC admission has adopted a comprehensive review process that considers students' personal and educational circumstances; the goal of which is to address the dropping numbers of enrollment of racial minority students after California banned affirmative action (Antonovics & Backes, 2014; Atkinson & Pelfrey, 2004; University of California Office of the President, 2019). UC's Regents Policy 2103—the Policy on Undergraduate admissions requirements, clearly elaborated on the requirements of freshman and transfer applicants to UC campuses. It was amended in March 1999, September 2004, February 2009, and later in May 2020 (Appendix A; University of California Office of the President, 2022a; University of California Board of Regents, 2022). Holding the diversity statement that “the knowledge that the University of California is open to qualified students from all groups, and thus serves all parts of the community equitably, helps sustain the social fabric of the State,” the University of California Board of Regents from reduced importance of SAT and

ACT consideration to no SAT/ACT consideration in May 2020 (University of California Board of Regents, 2020; University of California Office of the President, 2020).

### **Research on the University of California's Admission Policies**

A few studies have evaluated the effectiveness of UC's admissions policies designed to improve higher education equity or diversity of freshmen enrollment. Bleemer (2021) used regression analysis to examine the equilibrium effects of the combination of test-based admissions and eligibility in UC's ELC program from 2001 to 2011. Bleemer's (2021) study showed that the ELC policy counteracted the test-based admission policy and increased the selective universities' enrollment composition of the economically underrepresented students in UC's admission class from 2001 to 2011. Further, the regression analysis showed that the ELC policy significantly increased the chances for eligible applicants to enroll and earn degrees from highly selective universities and earn higher annual incomes than without the ELC policy (Bleemer, 2021). Although an admission policy based on top percentages had some positive effects, the standardized tests requirement ultimately for freshman admissions limited the impact of UC's ELC program.

Many studies have indicated that the standardized tests requirement limited the effectiveness of the ELC policy; however, through the adoption of a comprehensive review admission process in fall 2002 and onward, UC reduced the weight of standardized tests in finalizing a decision for freshman admissions. Although the specific procedures or weights of the comprehensive review were never released by UC, the Board of Admissions and Relations with Schools (BOARS) assessed the comprehensive review approach. Atkinson and Pelfrey (2004) concluded that UC's comprehensive review approach ensures the academic competency of

undergraduate students while simultaneously increasing the proportions of underrepresented students admitted to UC.

With similar results, Antonovics and Backes (2014) concluded that under UC's comprehensive review process, both minority and nonminority students with strong academic backgrounds—measured by standardized tests—had at the time a reduced admission rate because of the changing weights of application components. These students came from families with relatively higher education backgrounds and socioeconomic status than those with lower standardized test scores. In conclusion, lowering the weights of standardized tests in a comprehensive review could effectively advance the higher education equity of UC. Still, Atkinson and Pelfrey (2014) questioned standardized tests' predictive power on students' college readiness and stated that standardized tests can lead to barriers for URM students' planning and application process to enter a UC institution. Thus, the following section reviews the history of UC's adoption of the standardized tests requirements up to its suspension in order to demonstrate the rationale for using standardized tests for college admissions.

### **The University of California's Admission Policies of the Standardized Tests Requirement**

This section first traces the history and the initial implementation of the standardized tests requirement and reviews the critiques of the standardized tests for college entrance. Then, I explain the rationale of UC Regents Policy 2103's reform for freshman admissions since fall 2021 (University of California Office of the President, 2020). Finally, in the last part of this section, the first two years' admission results of UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement are reviewed and discussed.

## **History of the University of California's Standardized Tests Requirement**

The University of California started to debate and evaluate the rationales of requiring standardized tests for freshman applications in the late 1950s. The Board of Regents considered many issues regarding the policy of the standardized tests requirements, such as the exclusion of students with low-socioeconomic status, reduction of accessibility of immigrant students and historically underrepresented students, and the standardized tests' prediction of college education success of students—factors which are still scrutinized and evaluated today (Douglass, 2019).

Before adding in the standardized tests requirement policy, UC Academic Senate's Board of Admissions and Relations with Schools (BOARS) used grade-point averages (GPA) as the only indicator of students' qualifications and potential for success in higher education. The eligibility quota for enrolling in the University of California was the top 12.5% of UC-accredited high school students (Douglass, 2019). However, as the UC admissions used students' GPA as the single academic criteria for assessment, the issue of grade inflation peaked in the 1950s: UC-accredited high school students earned the same GPA with less academic competency and performance in the late 1950s compared with students from previous years. With this, approximately 14%-17% of students were qualified for the University of California enrollment: The GPA was no longer a gatekeeper, and the question of freshman collegiate success was forced into the spotlight (Douglass, 2019).

In 1958, when Professor Charles W. Jones at UC Berkeley became the chair of BOARS, he proposed the use of standardized testing for a two-year experimental period under the support of UC's new president, Clark Kerr. The University of California Academic Senate Regulation 256 was implemented in 1958, stating that 1960 fall applicants would need to take and submit

SAT scores, or similar achievement tests recognized by BOARS (University of California, Los Angeles, 1958). The policy was established and adopted to address grade inflation and over-the-quota enrollment based on the single requirement of GPA, and the SAT/ACT was used to evaluate out-of-state students who were not from UC-accredited schools. It was also more politically sound and acceptable for the freshman applicants for fall of 1960 than simply raising the GPA requirement from a “B” (3.00 out of 4.00) to higher points.

After the two-year experimental period, the SAT/ACT requirement was abandoned for 1962 fall admissions and then was reinstated for 1968 fall out-of-state admissions. However, it was not until 1979 that standardized test scores were required for a freshman applicant as an indicator of admission decisions—along with a high school GPA of 3.10 out of 4.00 or higher in UC’s “A-G” course requirements (Douglass, 2019). In the 1980s, UCLA and UC Berkeley became more selective, given the increasing number of UC-eligible students and limited placements at the two schools (Douglass, 2019). Thus, the SAT became a valuable tool for UC schools to select students for regular admissions. At the same time, they still used affirmative action to enroll students from historically underrepresented groups with little consideration of standardized testing (SAT/ACT).

Until the *California Civil Rights Initiative* (Proposition 209, 1996) was passed in 1995 by Regent Ward Connerly, the University of California Admissions could no longer use race and ethnicity to decide admission outcomes (Douglass, 2019). In reaction to the *California Civil Rights Initiative* (Proposition 209, 1996) and seeking to elevate higher education equity for historically underrepresented students and maintain a diverse student body, UC Berkeley took the initiative to implement a holistic or comprehensive review approach, which was elaborated

by the Regents of the University of California and is still implemented today (Douglass, 2019; University of California Office of the President, 2019).

As listed in the Guidelines for Implementation of University Policy on Undergraduate Admissions, UC's comprehensive review considers quantitative academic indicators and individuals' talents, skills, and family backgrounds to proceed toward an admission decision (University of California Office of the President, 2019). However, the weight of different qualitative and quantitative indicators in the holistic review of each applicant have been unclear. Affirmative action was banned, so the University of California could use a comprehensive review approach in its undergraduate admissions, which considers students' personal and family backgrounds in order to prioritize equity of first-generation college students, URM, and/or low-socioeconomic students. However, the comprehensive review still required and considered standardized tests, meaning that related barriers still exist for URM students to access higher education through a UC campus until fall 2020 admissions (University of California Office of the President, 2019).

### **Critiques of the Standardized Tests for College Entrance**

The studies that have evaluated and critiqued the standardized tests for college entrance are based on two aspects. The first aspect being the predictive power of standardized tests on students' college readiness, learning aptitude, or potential to succeed in college. The second aspect being the intrinsic issues of design and development of the standardized tests, which have been related to discrimination against all students except White males.

Several studies have analyzed standardized tests' validity in predicting students' college success. Atkinson and Geiser (2009) indicated that the high school cumulative grade point

average (GPA) was the most valid predictor of a student's college performance. The standardized testing agencies, universities, and independent researchers have all conducted quantitative studies to determine the extent that SAT scores can add validity to predicting students' college-ready talent on top of GPA (Soares, 2012). While the testing industry's statistical analysis concluded that adding standardized test results as an admission criterion—in addition to GPA—strengthens the explanatory power of a student's talent significantly. The highly selective institutions—such as Johns Hopkins University and DePaul University—and independent researchers only concluded a much lower increase of explanatory power of standardized tests, using the statistical methods and indicators (Kobrin et al., 2008; Soares, 2011; 2012).

Moreover, SAT/ACT test scores are discriminatory. The SAT/ACT test scores have shown disparities in gender, race, and family income. The studies that have analyzed test scores and demographics show that women—on average—score lower on quantitative sections than men, Latinx and Black students score lower than White students, and low-income students (measured by lower than \$20,000 annual family income) score lower than students from middle and high-income students (Soares, 2012).

Rosner (2011) studied the systematic bias in the SAT's question selection for both verbal and quantitative sections: The SAT questions were evaluated to answer the question whether students from different races, gender, and socioeconomic statuses could score equally well or equally poorly. The study concluded that the test questions are advantageous to Whites and men, which reinforces the gender and racial gaps through test scores (Rosner, 2011). One important reason for the discrimination caused by the SAT and ACT is that they are all commercially-

available tests—students and their families must pay to not only register but also purchase test preparation materials, tutoring, and counseling services to achieve high scores for college applications. The tests add financial barriers to low-income students, many of whom are URM students, in their college planning and application processes (Douglass, 2020).

Moreover, the commercialization of the SAT and ACT has led to the establishment of a testing industrial complex ever since selective, four-year universities adopted the policy requiring these scores. Del Carmen Unda and Lizárraga-Dueñas (2021) analyzed that the standardized testing policies formulate an industrial complex and perpetuate monetization of the U.S. public education system, which disproportionately profits off students who are racial minorities. In this case, given the fact that the SAT and ACT are both intrinsically racist and commercialized, higher education admissions policies—with the requirement of a standardized test that have been implemented for decades or nearly a century—have coined a unique standardized testing industrial complex for the U.S. higher education system.

In this complex—created by the higher education admissions policies that require standardized tests and heavily consider the applicants’ test scores—selective, four-year higher education admissions and enrollment in the United States has adopted a narrow sense of diversity based on students’ race and class. Superficially, the standardized test criteria increased the academic selectivity of the institutions, but intrinsically, it has created racial and socioeconomic disparities among applicants. URM students—and those who are low-income—have fewer opportunities to enter the highly selective universities that consider standardized tests and rely on them more heavily than those universities that no longer consider tests or have adopted test-optional policies.



## **UC's Elimination of the Standardized Tests Requirement after the COVID-19 Pandemic**

In May 2020, the University of California suspended the standardized tests requirement in its Regents Policy 2103; UC undergraduate admissions would no longer consider standardized test scores (University of California Office of the President, 2022a). The groundbreaking policy reform addressed the exacerbating education inequalities in the University of California and the state of California under the severe impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (Regents of the University of California, 2020; University of California Office of the President, 2020). Holding the diversity statement that “the knowledge that the University of California is open to qualified students from all groups, and thus serves all parts of the community equitably, helps sustain the social fabric of the State,” UC Board of Regents transitioned from reduced importance of SAT and ACT consideration to no SAT/ACT consideration (University of California Board of Regents, 2020).

The policy reform intended to support many historically underrepresented students who make up a larger portion than White students in the low socioeconomic status population. Espenshade and Chuang (2011) studied how the standardized test policy could influence different types of higher education institutions' admission results and students' social diversity. Their statistical simulation showed that private colleges' test-optional policies helped enroll more racially and socioeconomically diverse students with strong academic capacity measured by their GPA and AP scores (Espenshade & Chuang, 2011; Soares, 2012). In comparing different types of universities, studies have shown that public universities benefit more from not considering standardized tests to increase their students' diversity (Bowen et al., 2009; Soares, 2012). The policy has also alleviated the concerns of those who have opposed standardized

testing since the 1960s, as the scores are not effective predictors for college success, and the commercial components (test preparation costs) exclude underrepresented minority students and students with low socioeconomic status (Douglass, 2019; 2020).

During the suspension of the standardized tests requirement, University of California Office of the President asked the Academic Senate to form the Smarter Balanced Study Group, which attempted to develop a new assessment—the Smarter Balanced assessment—to measure freshman applicants’ UC readiness (The Smarter Balanced Study Group, 2021). According to University of California Office of the President (2020), “If by 2025 the new test is either unfeasible or not ready, consideration of the ACT/SAT for freshman admissions would still be eliminated for California students.” In September 2021, the Smarter Balanced Study Group (2021) reported their evaluations of the feasibility and necessity of the Smarter Balanced assessment: It recommended that the assessment should not be adopted in UC freshman admissions.

Endorsing this recommendation, the Regents of the University of California decided to permanently eliminate the standardized tests requirement for UC freshman admissions (University of California Office of the President, 2022b). They then amended Regents Policies related to undergraduate admissions and requirements (University of California Office of the President, 2022b). With the amendments, Regents Policy 2103—Policy on Undergraduate Admissions Requirements, which still included standardized tests as one of the requirements, required revision and thus was rescinded by the Regents of the University of California (University of California Office of the President, 2022b). Accordingly, seven separate Regents Policies related to freshman admissions requirements were amended and consolidated into

Regents Policy 2102—Policy on Undergraduate Admissions (University of California Board of Regents, 2022; University of California Office of the President, 2022b). Appendix B provides the Regents of the University of California’s meeting report of the rationale and the detailed Regents Policies amendment about the rescission of Regents Policy 2103 and the amendment of Regents Policy 2102 (University of California Office of the President, 2022a).

**The First Two-Year Results of UC’s Elimination of the Standardized Tests Requirement**

The freshmen admissions result of the University of California system broke the records of previous years regarding student diversity. As displayed in Table 5, the California freshman admission number jumped from 113,339 for fall 2020 to 132,337 for fall 2022 (University of California Information Center, 2022a):

**Table 5**

*The First Two-year Results of UC’s Elimination of the Standardized Tests Requirement, CA Residents*

	Freshman Application, All Campuses, CA Residents			Freshman Admissions, All Campuses, CA Residents		
	Fall 2020	Fall 2021	Fall 2022	Fall 2020	Fall 2021	Fall 2022
URM Students in California	50,621	57,406	59,818	33,012	36,208	37,134
All Students in California	113,339	128,128	132,337	79,953	84,223	85,268
URM Students Proportion	44.7%	44.8%	45.2%	41.3%	43.0%	43.5%
URM Admissions rate	65.2%	63.1%	62.1%			
Overall Admissions Rate	70.5%	65.7%	64.4%			

*Note.* Adapted from *Table 2.1 University of California Freshman Applications by Campus and Race/Ethnicity Fall 2020, 2021, and 2022 [Data Set]* by University of California Office of the President, 2022c, copyright 2023 by University of California Office of the President, Graduate, Undergraduate and Equity Affairs, Admissions; *Table 2.1 University of California Freshman Admissions by Campus and Race/Ethnicity Fall 2020, 2021, and 2022 [Data Set]* by University of California Office of the President, 2022d, copyright 2023 by University of California Office of the President, Graduate, Undergraduate and Equity Affairs, Admissions. URM students’ proportion is calculated through dividing URM students’ number by all students; for example, URM students’ freshman application proportion is calculated by dividing 50,621 by 113,339.

URM students made up 43.5% of all the admitted freshmen for fall 2022 and 43.0% for fall 2021, which grew from 41.3% for the 2020 fall and reached the highest percentage over the past few decades (The Smarter Balanced Study Group, 2021; University of California

Information Center, 2022a; University of California Office of the President, 2022c). Although the numbers and percentage composition of admitted URM freshmen to the University of California indicate the potential positive effects of UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement, it is worth noticing that the freshman admissions rate (calculated by dividing the admissions number by application number) for URM students decreased for four UC campuses, including UCLA and UC Berkeley—the two most selective UC campuses—and decreased overall from 65.2% for fall 2020 to 62.1% fall 2022. Meanwhile, the admissions rate of URM students (62.1% for fall 2022) was still lower than the overall admissions rates (64.4% for fall 2022), meaning that non-URM students could still have a higher chance of accessing UC's selective, four-year higher education than URM students (University of California Information Center, 2022a).

According to a study group of UC Academic Senate, the admission results for fall 2021 compared with those for fall 2020 largely resulted from two main factors: the partial suspension of the SAT/ACT (University of California Office of the President, 2022a) and the acceptance of pass/no pass grades during the COVID-19 pandemic (The Smarter Balanced Study Group, 2021). As the numbers of applications and admissions for both URM students and non-URM students increased from fall 2021 to fall 2022, this research examined the real and immediate effects of one of the primary and ongoing factors of this trend—UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement—and how the policy reform specifically affected URM students.

Based on the first two years' applications and admissions numbers, all students seem to have benefited from UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement (increased admissions numbers for all students), but selectivity for URM students increased overall

(decreased admissions rates for URM students); however, there still exists an inequity of admissions as a whole (lower admissions rates of URM students than that of all students) (University of California Information Center, 2023). Therefore, this CPA explored, interpreted, and relayed counter-stories of URM students' college planning and application experiences after UC eliminated the standardized tests requirement. This CPA also discussed how and why the policy reform has advanced—or not—the higher education equity in UC's admission system.

### **Student Perceptions and Experiences under Education Policy Reform**

Each time higher education institutions present a new policy or policy reform regarding administrations, students are among the key stakeholders with limited power in policy making; yet they are the ones directly influenced by policy changes. Several scholars have studied marginalized students' perceptions and experiences in order to examine the outcomes of higher education administration or policy changes, identify unrevealed themes and needs, and develop strategies to improve the education policy effectiveness or practices to advance education equity.

Postlewaite and Frankland (2021) studied college students' perceptions of the university's financial decisions to cut expenses under the financial uncertainties and stress caused by the COVID-19 pandemic by analyzing student survey results and answers from open-ended interview questions. Understanding student perceptions of the university administration's decision changes and their experiences influenced by these changes provided higher education institutions' communication strategies to build long-term financial stability.

Fuentes's (2019) ethnographic study of three English Learners—defined as bi/multilingual students who did not meet the university's language requirement during high school—analyzed their perceptions and experiences of appropriating the U.S. higher education

English language policy and navigating immigrant identities. With the findings, Fuentes proposed language policy appropriation strategies for English Learners and provided policy indications to address the potential inequities and inequalities posed by the higher education language requirement. Rezai-Rashti and Lingard (2021) interviewed 85 urban high school racial minority students from Canada and Australia to understand their perceptions and experiences with provincial and national standardized testing and test-based accountability. Rezai-Rashti and Lingard (2021) then concluded the systematic policy's effects on social and racial inequalities.

Several scholars have adopted phenomenological approaches to study the experiences and perceptions of URM students. Jackson et al. (2019) studied how the lived experiences of Black first-time, full-time, provisionally admitted male college students in Georgia influenced their self-efficacy, autonomy, college retention, and academic success. The findings helped faculty, student affairs professionals, higher education institution administrators, and scholars to understand the factors that contribute to the college success of provisionally admitted Black male college students. Ricks and Warren (2021) also used a phenomenological approach to study the lived experiences of ten first-generation college senior students who enrolled and thrived at a university in the United States. From the interviews, the scholars explored the pre-college experiences, the factors that led to attending college, and the support they got to enter a four-year college. The emerging themes from the study's findings were used to improve counseling practices and college going and access of first-generation college students. The phenomenological approaches of these studies also provided references for designing this study's methodology.

Vue et al. (2017) conducted semi-structured interviews of 46 high-achieving Black and Latinx college students from race-conscious college access programs to investigate how the students make sense of race, intersectionality, and equity in the era of “colorblind” politics. From studying these students’ perspectives, the authors proposed conceptual differences between post-racial era conditions and post-racist aspirations (Vue et al., 2017).

Grant (2020) studied the complex experience of four high school senior students who all self-identified as White and were from a public high school in an upper-middle-class suburb community. He used a qualitative portraiture method to understand how adolescents navigated the increasingly competitive, high-pressure college preparation and application process in the specific cultural context by analyzing the students’ beliefs, assumptions, worldviews, and emotional well-being (Grant, 2020). Although the student population of Grant’s (2020) research was upper-middle-class White students, the study was unique in its exploration of high school students’ college planning process. It provided useful concepts for instrumental construction of this study; I examined whether URM students perceived stress and competition given the increased opportunities and selectivity of UC’s freshman admissions.

### **Conclusion**

The U.S. higher education institutions were initially established to only enroll White Christian male students. Until in the late 19th century, the federal government and legislators claimed women’s and Black students’ rights to higher education. However, this history of the U.S. higher education has led to long-term disparities among students from diverse gender, racial, and socioeconomic backgrounds. In the 1960s, affirmative action was mandated for public higher education institutions—such as UC—to provide preferential admissions and increase

opportunities for accessing higher education for traditionally underrepresented students. However, nine states have banned affirmative action under strong opposition or controversies; California was the first of the nine states to ban affirmative action.

The passing of *California Civil Rights Initiative* (Proposition 209, 1996) and two failures to repeal it have raised questions to the educators, counselors, K-12 schools, and higher education institutions in California on advancing equity and increasing college access to the historically underrepresented students—or the URM students—of this study. UC has implemented a series of admissions policies and programs to prioritize the equity and diversity of students. This research was a case study that explored specifically the influences of UC’s elimination of the standardized tests requirement on URM students.

Previous studies have identified barriers to college planning and application faced by URM students: English language proficiency; discrimination and acculturation; student motivation and self-efficacy; academic preparation, work, and family responsibilities; educators’ negative or low expectations towards students’ financial needs; and additional stress related to college preparation and increased selectivity (Capizzi et al., 2017; Cook et al., 2015; Erisman & Looney, 2007; Guevara-Cruz, 2018; Pérusse et al., 2017; Princeton Review, 2022). However, only a few studies were conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, none of which mentioned UC’s elimination of the standardized tests requirement. With heightened economic barriers caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, UC’s elimination of the standardized tests requirement was designed to advance equity for URM students and remove barriers to the college planning and application process. Therefore, through the counter-storytelling tenet of critical race theory, this research relayed stories of URM students through their college planning and application



experiences and perspectives after UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement and in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Studies regarding the SAT and other standardized tests have indicated that the exams hold limited predicting power on students' aptitude and college success, are intrinsically exclusive and discriminatory against non-White, non-male students, and decrease the diversity of college admissions when the tests are required (Atkinson & Geiser, 2009; Bowen et al., 2009; Espenshade & Chuang, 2011; Kobrin et al., 2008; Rosner, 2011; Soares, 2011; 2012). This study examined whether identified barriers by previous studies were removed or alleviated for certain URM students—such as financial needs, academic preparation for standardized tests, stress and anxiety related to test preparation, etc.—after UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement. It also identified any emerged or uncovered barriers URM students have faced since the policy reform that were not included in previous studies. In this study, higher education equity was defined as equal higher education opportunities through removing barriers and addressing long-term disparities that URM students face. Therefore, the findings of this research related to the URM students' barriers in the college planning and application process were used to discuss and answer whether higher education equity has been advanced—or not—by UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement.

This literature review also included several studies on students' experiences and perceptions, many of which used phenomenological approaches to examine the effects and influences of an education policy implementation on students; or they provided implications and strategies for policymakers and institution leaders to improve policy effectiveness (Fuentes, 2019; Grant, 2020; Jackson et al., 2019; Postlewaite & Frankland, 2021; Rezai-Rashti &

Lingard, 2021; Ricks & Warren, 2021). These studies provided examples and inspirations for the methodological design of this case study. Through a phenomenological approach, this research sought to fill the gap in the literature on student experiences and perceptions of the college planning and application process after UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement in the contexts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

This critical policy analysis research focused on the case of UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement and explored the immediate effects of the policy reform and its influences on higher education equity in UC's admissions system. The policy reform was developed and implemented soon after the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak in spring 2020: UC would not require or consider standardized tests, the SAT, or the ACT starting in fall 2021 to fall 2024 freshman admissions as one of the 14 factors of the comprehensive review in its admissions process (University of California Office of the President, 2019; 2022a).

The first two-year statistical results of UC admissions indicate that after UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement, the number of URM freshman applications and admissions increased while the application and admissions proportion of URM students to all students in California also increased; nevertheless, the admissions rate of URM students were still greater than those of all students in California, and the overall UC admissions selectivity decreased for URM students (University of California Office of the President, 2022d; University of California Information Center, 2023). Therefore, this critical policy analysis adopted a phenomenological approach and relayed counter-stories of lived experiences of URM students who have been influenced by UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement, which was further analyzed through tenets of critical race theory.

The research methodology was designed to collect and interpret the college planning and application experiences of a group of URM students who applied to at least one UC campus after the policy reform's implementation and those same students' perceptions towards selective, four-

year higher education admissions and its equity. This chapter first reiterates the research questions and describes the qualitative research design. Then, the qualitative data collection process—which included participant selection criteria, sampling methods, recruitment procedures, data collection procedures, and instrument construction—is carefully detailed. Lastly, this chapter explains the three data analysis phases and discusses the research design’s reliability, validity, and trustworthiness.

### **Research Questions**

The University of California’s elimination of the standardized tests requirement—expedited by the COVID-19 pandemic—was unprecedented. It sought to advance higher education equity and remove barriers for historically underrepresented students trying to access a selective, four-year higher education. UC’s fall 2021 and fall 2022 admission statistics reveal increased opportunities, admission numbers, and selectivity for URM and non-URM students for the first two years of UC’s elimination of the standardized tests requirement for freshman admissions. As UC’s admissions policy reform had been implemented for only two years at the time of this research, the long-term effects and impact of the policy regarding equity advancement remain unknown.

Additionally, there was limited research on URM students’ perspectives and experiences after UC’s elimination of the standardized tests requirement at the time of this study; the lack of qualitative studies on how and why this policy reform or similar policies of eliminating could possibly advance higher education equity through admissions. Thus, this qualitative study explored the URM freshman applicants’ experiences of the college planning and application process for the University of California for fall 2022 and their perceptions towards selective,

four-year higher education admissions and its equity. The combination of these factors led to the following two questions:

1. What are the college planning and application experiences of URM students after UC eliminated the standardized tests requirement in its freshman admissions?
2. What are URM students' perceptions of higher education equity as a result of UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement in its freshman admissions?

### **Research Design**

Qualitative research studies the meaning of individuals' lives, their views, and perspectives in real-world roles and contexts (Yin, 2015). Phenomenology makes meaning of several individuals' lived experiences of a phenomenon in their real-world roles and contexts, and phenomenological research assumes that an individual's lived experiences are not only subjective, but also objective experiences that are shared with others (Creswell, 2013). Meanwhile, to understand racial subordination and systematic oppression in higher education, experiential knowledge through counter-storytelling is a critical, valuable, appropriate, and legitimate method of analysis (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Matsuda et al., 1993; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015).

Thus, based on these theories, this critical policy analysis research utilized a phenomenological approach in combination with the CRT tenet of counter-storytelling to study the case of UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement—specifically, its influences on URM students in California and its effects on higher education equity of UC's admissions system. To bracket individual experiences and find the essence of the central phenomenon, Creswell (2013) suggested 12-20 participants who experienced the phenomenon, and this study

included 14 URM student participants. To collect counter-stories of the URM students, the data collection methods involved demographic surveys, focus groups, and interviews. The focus groups and interviews were semi-structured and conversational. Each question was open-ended, allowing URM student participants to describe their lived experiences and perceptions of their college planning and application and higher education equity of UC's admissions system.

### **Qualitative Data Collection**

The qualitative data collection procedures included five sections: (a) participation selection criteria, (b) sampling method, (c) recruitment procedures, (d) data collection procedures, (d) instrumentation.

#### **Participants Selection Criteria**

The participants of this study were URM students who applied to the University of California for fall 2022 and were enrolled in a four-year college at the time of this study. As UC's suspension of the standardized tests requirement was officially announced and executed by the Board of Regent in May 2020 for the freshman admissions starting in fall 2021 to fall 2024, students who applied to UC for fall 2022 were the individuals influenced by the admissions policy reform from their late sophomore to senior year; this period involved both their college planning and application processes.

Participant recruitment was based on the following selection criteria. The 14 URM student participants of this research were admitted and enrolled in UCLA, UCI, UCSD, UCR, and CSULB, which had a wide range of admissions selectivity:

1. Identify as a URM student,
2. Be at least 18 years old,

3. Applied to the University of California for fall 2022 as a freshman applicant,
4. Be currently enrolled in a university as a freshman since fall 2022, and
5. Be able to participate in a focus group and a follow-up interview through Zoom.

### **Sampling Method**

Because of the time and cost limitations of a dissertation study, this qualitative, exploratory research study used a convenience sampling method to study the population. The researcher recruited participants on a social media platform: Instagram ([www.instagram.com](http://www.instagram.com)). From a social media account where UC newly admitted and committed students share and post their bios, the researcher used direct messaging to reach out to these students individually. Meanwhile, snowballing was used by asking the participants to share the information for this research study and refer prospective participants they knew through the same social media platform (Naderifar, 2017). The sampling method was judgmental—or purposive—because only the URM students who were interested and applied to one or more UC campuses met the selection criteria and were invited to participate in the study.

### **Recruitment Procedures**

During the recruitment, 11 participants were found through Instagram and three were through snowballing. An invitation letter—which introduced the research study and asked for targeted URM students' consent to participate in the study—was prepared for each participant to read (see Appendix C). After reading the invitation letter and responding with a willingness to participate, the researcher asked the prospective participants to sign the informed consent form (see Appendix D) and fill out the demographic survey (see Appendix E) through a Qualtrics link ([www.qualtrics.com](http://www.qualtrics.com)). The researcher received 19 demographic survey responses from Qualtrics

but confirmed that only 14 participants completed the entire survey, met all the selection criteria, and signed the consent form to participate in a 45-minute focus group and one 45-minute follow-up interview for deeper insights. A small incentive of a \$25.00 Amazon gift card was awarded to each participant through email upon completion of their interview.

**Data Collection Procedures**

As soon as the Loyola Marymount University Institutional Review Boards (IRB) approved this research study, the researcher started the participant recruitment and data collection procedures.

Table 6 provides the timeline for the entire data collection process:

**Table 6**  
*Data Collection and Analysis Timeline*

Timeline	Research Progress
July 2022	Successfully defended the dissertation proposal.
July–Aug 2022	Acquired IRB approval for this study.
Aug–Oct 2022	Recruited 14 participants; collected demographic information and informed consent forms from the participants; conducted two focus groups; revised interview protocols; and conducted 14 individual interviews.
Nov 2022–Feb 2023	Completed three phrases of data analysis.
Dec 2022–Mar 2023	Completed finding discussions and the dissertation draft.

The recruitment process began in August 2022 and continued until October 2022 to ensure all the recruited participants were successfully enrolled as college freshmen in fall 2022. Once the researcher received the demographic survey and the signed informed consent form from an individual and confirmed that the five selection criteria were all met, the participant was invited to schedule a 45-minute video conference focus group using Zoom ([www.zoom.us](http://www.zoom.us)).

Given the time conflicts of the URM students who were all recently enrolled in a four-year university—or about to enroll—I was able to conduct two focus groups: the first one with



four participants and the second with three. Based on the emergent themes from the focus groups—which were not covered by Chapter 2—the researcher improved the interview protocol by adding a few follow-up questions to elicit participant insights. I then conducted 14 interviews.

With consent from the participants, each focus group and interview was recorded and transcribed for data analysis and stored in a password-protected program. The names of the participants were not used in any public distribution, and all identifying information of the participants was removed or destroyed when the research study ended in August 2023. The recordings were first transcribed using Otter.ai, and then corrected for inaccurate wordings and quotes; only stuttered words for data analysis and discussion were adjusted. Meanwhile, pseudonyms were given to the participants during the data collection and analysis process. Still, confidentiality may have been breached given the nature of the focus group. However, all the participants agreed to respect confidentiality and to not release information discussed in the focus groups.

### **Instrumentation**

Three instruments were developed to collect information from the participants: a demographic survey (see Appendix E), a focus group protocol (see Appendix F), and an interview protocol (see Appendix G). Table 7 provides the constructs, literature, and theories connected to each demographic survey question. The survey questions were designed with reference to UCLA Higher Education Research Institute (HERI)'s 2022 CIRP Freshman Survey questions (2022):

**Table 7***The Demographic Survey Items Construct*

Question	Construct	Citation
1.NAME ____, ____ (First, Last)	Name	Identification
2. When were you born? __/__/____ (MM/DD/YYYY)	Age	Demographic (Age)
3. What is your current gender identity? a. Man b. Woman c. Non-binary d. Gender queer/Gender non-conforming Identity not listed above	Gender	Demographic (gender identity)
4. In what year did you graduate from high school? a. 2022 b. 2021 c. 2020 or earlier	Year of High School Graduation	Demographic (year of high school graduation)
5. In what year did you enroll in college? a. 2022 b. 2021 c. 2020 or earlier	Year of Enrollment	Demographic (year of college enrollment)
6. Which college are you enrolling in? c. _____	Background information	Demographic (college)
7. You are enrolled in college as a: a. Full-time student Part-time student	Background information	Demographic (college enrollment status)

*Note.* The survey questions were designed with references to *2022 CIRP Freshman Survey*, by UCLA Higher Education Research Institute, 2022, <https://ucla.app.box.com/v/TFS-instrument>, copyright 2022 by UCLA Higher Education Research Institute; “Promoting Low-income Students’ Readiness, Well-being, and Success: A Gear Up Counseling Program Study”, by L. M. Capizzi, C. H. Hofstetter, D.D. Mena, B. Duckor, & X. Hu, 2017, *Journal of School Counseling*, 15(3), 1-26, <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1144755>, copyright 2017 by College of Education, Health & Human Development, Montana State University; “Promoting College Access Among Latina/O English Language Learners: Implications for Professional School Counselors”, by A. L. Cook, R. Pérusse, & E. D. Rojas, 2015, *Journal of School Counseling*, 13(18), 1-43, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1076446.pdf>, copyright 2015 by College of Education, Health & Human Development, Montana State University; “The Importance of College-Going Culture for Latinos Prior to High School”, by G. Guevara-Cruz, 2018, *Harvard Journal of Hispanic Policy*, 30, 63-72, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A634429522/AONE?u=googlescholar&sid=googleScholar&xid=bc350530>, copyright 2018 by President and Fellows of Harvard College, through the John F. Kennedy School of Government; “School Counseling: Partnering With a School District to Provide Postsecondary Opportunities for First-Generation, Low Income, and Students of Color”, by R. Pérusse, N. DeRonck, & J. Parzych, 2017, *Psychology in the Schools*, 54(10), 1222–1228, <https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.22084>, copyright by Wiley Periodicals, LLC; *Fall Enrollment at a Glance [Data Set]*, by University of California Information Center, 2022b, copyright 2023 by The Regents of the University of California; *Table 2.1 University of California Freshman Admissions by Campus and Race/Ethnicity Fall 2020, 2021, and 2022 [Data Set]*, by University of California Office of the President, 2022d, copyright 2023 by University of California Office of the President, Graduate, Undergraduate and Equity Affairs, Admissions.

**Table 7 (continued)**

*The Demographic Survey Items Construct*

Question	Construct	Citation
8. Is English your primary language? a. Yes b. No	Identity	Demographic (language; intersectionality) Previous research studies indicated that students who are traditionally underrepresented in higher education include students who are low-income, language learners, Latinx students, Black students, Indian American, and first-generation college students (Capizzi et al., 2017; Cook et al., 2015; Guevara-Cruz, 2018; Pérusse et al., 2017). The intersectionality of identities leads to multi-layered barriers of the college planning and application process.
9. Are you qualified or receiving Pell Grants? a. Yes b. No	Socioeconomic status	Demographic (income; intersectionality) The intersectionality of identities leads to multi-layered barriers of the college planning and application process.
10. Are you a first-generation college student? a. Yes b. No	Identity	Demographic (parent education; intersectionality) The intersectionality of identities leads to multi-layered barriers of the college planning and application process.
11. You identify yourself as: a. Hispanic/Latinx b. African American/Black c. American Indian d. Asian/Pacific Islander e. White f. International g. Other/Unknown h. Do not want to share	Identity	Demographic (ethnicity) The intersectionality of identities leads to multi-layered barriers of the college planning and application process.

*Note.* The survey questions were designed with references to *2022 CIRP Freshman Survey*, by UCLA Higher Education Research Institute, 2022, <https://ucla.app.box.com/v/TFS-instrument>, copyright 2022 by UCLA Higher Education Research Institute; “Promoting Low-income Students’ Readiness, Well-being, and Success: A Gear Up Counseling Program Study”, by L. M. Capizzi, C. H. Hofstetter, D.D. Mena, B. Duckor, & X. Hu, 2017, *Journal of School Counseling*, 15(3), 1-26, <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1144755>, copyright 2017 by College of Education, Health & Human Development, Montana State University; “Promoting College Access Among Latina/O English Language Learners: Implications for Professional School Counselors”, by A. L. Cook, R. Pérusse, & E. D. Rojas, 2015, *Journal of School Counseling*, 13(18), 1-43, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1076446.pdf>, copyright 2015 by College of Education, Health & Human Development, Montana State University; “The Importance of College-Going Culture for Latinos Prior to High School”, by G. Guevara-Cruz, 2018, *Harvard Journal of Hispanic Policy*, 30, 63-72, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A634429522/AONE?u=googlescholar&sid=googleScholar&xid=bc350530>, copyright 2018 by President and Fellows of Harvard College, through the John F. Kennedy School of Government; “School Counseling: Partnering With a School District to Provide Postsecondary Opportunities for First-Generation, Low Income, and Students of Color”, by R. Pérusse, N. DeRonck, & J. Parzych, 2017, *Psychology in the Schools*, 54(10), 1222–1228, <https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.22084>, copyright by Wiley Periodicals, LLC; *Fall Enrollment at a Glance [Data Set]*, by University of California Information Center, 2022b, copyright 2023 by The Regents of the University of California; *Table 2.1 University of California Freshman Admissions by Campus and Race/Ethnicity Fall 2020, 2021, and 2022 [Data Set]*, by University of California Office of the President, 2022d, copyright 2023 by University of California Office of the President, Graduate, Undergraduate and Equity Affairs, Admissions.

**Table 7 (continued)**

*The Demographic Survey Items Construct*

Question	Construct	Citation
<p>12. Citizenship status (Select one):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Domestic Student (U.S. citizen or Permanent resident (green card))</li> <li>b. International student (i.e., F-1, J-1, or M-1 visa)</li> <li>c. Undocumented or DACA student</li> <li>d. None of the above</li> </ul>	<p>Citizenship Status</p>	<p>Demographic (Citizenship) The URM students of study include both domestic students and undocumented or DACA students.</p>
<p>13. Did you apply for the University of California?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. YES</li> <li>b. NO</li> </ul>	<p>Experience, UC Application</p>	<p>The URM applicants number jumped from 50,621 for 2020 fall to 59,818 for 2022 fall, and their admissions number from 33,012 for 2020 fall to 37,134 for 2022 fall (University of California Information Center, 2022a). URM students' admissions proportion to all students increased from 41.3% for fall 2020 to 43.5% for fall 2022 (University of California Office of the President, 2022d).</p>
<p>14. If YES to Q13, which schools did you get admitted to? (choose all that apply)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>e. UCLA</li> <li>f. UC Berkeley</li> <li>g. UC Santa Barbara</li> <li>h. UC Irvine</li> <li>i. UC San Diego</li> <li>j. UC Merced</li> <li>k. UC Riverside</li> <li>l. UC Santa Cruz</li> </ul>	<p>Experience, UC Admissions Results</p>	<p>The URM applicants number jumped from 50,621 for 2020 fall to 59,818 for 2022 fall, and their admissions number from 33,012 for 2020 fall to 37,134 for 2022 fall (University of California Information Center, 2022a). URM students' admissions proportion to all students increased from 41.3% for fall 2020 to 43.5% for fall 2022 (University of California Office of the President, 2022d).</p>

*Note.* The survey questions were designed with references to *2022 CIRP Freshman Survey*, by UCLA Higher Education Research Institute, 2022, <https://ucla.app.box.com/v/TFS-instrument>, copyright 2022 by UCLA Higher Education Research Institute; “Promoting Low-income Students’ Readiness, Well-being, and Success: A Gear Up Counseling Program Study”, by L. M. Capizzi, C. H. Hofstetter, D.D. Mena, B. Duckor, & X. Hu, 2017, *Journal of School Counseling*, 15(3), 1-26, <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1144755>, copyright 2017 by College of Education, Health & Human Development, Montana State University; “Promoting College Access Among Latina/O English Language Learners: Implications for Professional School Counselors”, by A. L. Cook, R. Pérusse, & E. D. Rojas, 2015, *Journal of School Counseling*, 13(18), 1-43, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1076446.pdf>, copyright 2015 by College of Education, Health & Human Development, Montana State University; “The Importance of College-Going Culture for Latinos Prior to High School”, by G. Guevara-Cruz, 2018, *Harvard Journal of Hispanic Policy*, 30, 63-72, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A634429522/AONE?u=googlescholar&sid=googleScholar&xid=bc350530>, copyright 2018 by President and Fellows of Harvard College, through the John F. Kennedy School of Government; “School Counseling: Partnering With a School District to Provide Postsecondary Opportunities for First-Generation, Low Income, and Students of Color”, by R. Pérusse, N. DeRonck, & J. Parzych, 2017, *Psychology in the Schools*, 54(10), 1222–1228, <https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.22084>, copyright by Wiley Periodicals, LLC; *Fall Enrollment at a Glance [Data Set]*, by University of California Information Center, 2022b, copyright 2023 by The Regents of the University of California; *Table 2.1 University of California Freshman Admissions by Campus and Race/Ethnicity Fall 2020, 2021, and 2022 [Data Set]*, by University of California Office of the President, 2022d, copyright 2023 by University of California Office of the President, Graduate, Undergraduate and Equity Affairs, Admissions.

**Table 7 (continued)**

*The Demographic Survey Items Construct*

Question	Construct	Citation
15. Did you prepare for the SAT and/or ACT? a. Only SAT b. Only ACT c. SAT and ACT d. Did not take either test	Experience of Standardized Tests Preparation	UC’s suspension of the standardized tests requirement for its freshman admission policy influences directly students’ experiences of standardized tests preparation.
16. Did you take the SAT and/or ACT? a. Only SAT b. Only ACT c. SAT and ACT Did not take either test	Experience of Standardized Tests Preparation	UC’s suspension of the standardized tests requirement of its freshman admission policy influences directly students’ experiences of standardized tests preparation.
17. Are you willing to join a focus group and a follow-up interview to share your experiences and perspectives related to college planning and application and UC’s admissions policy? a. YES NO	Willingness to join the focus group and be interviewed	

*Note.* The survey questions were designed with references to *2022 CIRP Freshman Survey*, by UCLA Higher Education Research Institute, 2022, <https://ucla.app.box.com/v/TFS-instrument>, copyright 2022 by UCLA Higher Education Research Institute; “Promoting Low-income Students’ Readiness, Well-being, and Success: A Gear Up Counseling Program Study”, by L. M. Capizzi, C. H. Hofstetter, D.D. Mena, B. Duckor, & X. Hu, 2017, *Journal of School Counseling*, 15(3), 1-26, <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1144755>, copyright 2017 by College of Education, Health & Human Development, Montana State University; “Promoting College Access Among Latina/O English Language Learners: Implications for Professional School Counselors”, by A. L. Cook, R. Pérusse, & E. D. Rojas, 2015, *Journal of School Counseling*, 13(18), 1-43, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1076446.pdf>, copyright 2015 by College of Education, Health & Human Development, Montana State University; “The Importance of College-Going Culture for Latinos Prior to High School”, by G. Guevara-Cruz, 2018, *Harvard Journal of Hispanic Policy*, 30, 63-72, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A634429522/AONE?u=googleScholar&sid=googleScholar&xid=bc350530>, copyright 2018 by President and Fellows of Harvard College, through the John F. Kennedy School of Government; “School Counseling: Partnering With a School District to Provide Postsecondary Opportunities for First-Generation, Low Income, and Students of Color”, by R. Pérusse, N. DeRonck, & J. Parzych, 2017, *Psychology in the Schools*, 54(10), 1222–1228, <https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.22084>, copyright by Wiley Periodicals, LLC; *Fall Enrollment at a Glance [Data Set]*, by University of California Information Center, 2022b, copyright 2023 by The Regents of the University of California; *Table 2.1 University of California Freshman Admissions by Campus and Race/Ethnicity Fall 2020, 2021, and 2022 [Data Set]*, by University of California Office of the President, 2022d, copyright 2023 by University of California Office of the President, Graduate, Undergraduate and Equity Affairs, Admissions.

Table 8 presents the constructs of the focus group protocol. The questions were developed based on the research questions, topics, and themes from the literature review. These questions were designed to be non-leading and were more open and general than the interview questions in order to give room for uncovered themes and topics from the current literature

review. Further, the last question asked for unexplored or missing topics related to the research question.

**Table 8**

*The Focus Group Protocol Constructs*

Question	Construct	Citation
<p>1. Please identify:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Your pronoun</li> <li>b. The college you are attending now</li> <li>c. The year of college</li> <li>d. Provide a brief description of your college planning and application experience.</li> </ul>	<p>Phenomenology research</p>	<p>This is an opening question to build rapport. There are a number of studies that understand students' experiences and perceptions, many of which use phenomenological approaches, to examine the effects and influences of an education policy implementation or provide implications and strategies for policy makers and institution leaders to improve policy effectiveness (Fuentes, 2019; Grant, 2020; Jackson et al., 2019; Postlewaite &amp; Frankland, 2021; Rezai-Rashti &amp; Lingard, 2021; Ricks &amp; Warren, 2021).</p>
<p>2. From your college planning and application experience, what barriers did you face during your college planning and application process?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. If you were able to overcome the barriers, describe how you did it.</li> <li>b. If you were not able to overcome the barriers, what would have helped?</li> </ul>	<p>College application and access barriers</p>	<p>The barriers faced by URM students include English language proficiency, discrimination and acculturation, student motivation and self-efficacy, academic preparation, work and family responsibilities, educators' negative or low expectations towards students, financial needs, and additional stress related to college preparation and increased selectivity (Capizzi et al., 2017; Cook et al., 2015; Erisman &amp; Looney, 2007; Guevara-Cruz, 2018; Pérusse et al., 2017; Princeton Review, 2022).</p>
<p>3. Please describe how have the COVID-19 has influenced your college planning and application process.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Are there new barriers that emerged? Please describe.</li> </ul>	<p>Barriers related to COVID-19 pandemic and distance learning</p>	<p>There are not any published studies that explore students' experiences and perceptions of the college planning and application process after the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak and UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement. Expectedly, UC's policy reform removes some college preparation and access barriers related to test preparation for URM students. However, the sub-question is designed to ask for unknown or emerging barriers during this unprecedented era with the pandemic and UC's admissions policy reform.</p>

*Note.* At the time of construction of this protocol, from April 2022 to June 2022, UC's Regents Policy 2103 had not been rescinded. See reference and copyright information at the end of Table 8.

**Table 8 (Continued)**

*The Focus Group Protocol Constructs*

Question	Construct	Citation
<p>4. If you took the SAT or ACT before, please describe if the SAT had added barriers or stress to your college planning and application process?</p>	<p>College application and access barriers; the SAT and other standardized tests' validity and intrinsic discrimination.</p>	<p>Barriers related to preparing and taking standardized tests include limited language proficiency and limited financial, tutoring, and other needed resources to do well in the tests (Capizzi et al., 2017; Cook et al., 2015; Erisman &amp; Looney, 2007; Guevara-Cruz, 2018; Pérusse et al., 2017; Princeton Review, 2022). Studies for the SAT and other standardized tests indicates that the exams have limited predicting power on students' aptitude and college success and decrease diversity of college admissions when the tests are required (Atkinson &amp; Geiser, 2009; Kobrin et al., 2008; Rosner, 2011; Soares, 2012). Further, the SAT is intrinsically exclusive and discriminatory against non-White, non-male students (Bowen et al., 2009; Espenshade &amp; Chuang, 2011; Soares, 2011).</p>
<p>5. How did your college planning and application process change after the implementation of UC's Regents Policy 2103's policy reform of suspending standardized tests?</p> <p>a. What barriers are removed or alleviated?</p> <p>b. Were there emerging barriers after the policy implementation?</p>	<p>Student experiences; Policy implementation outcomes; College application and access barriers; Covid-19 pandemic's impact.</p>	<p>The URM applicants number jumped from 50,621 for 2020 Fall to 59,818 for 2022 Fall, and their admissions number from 33,012 for 2020 fall to 37,134 for 2022 fall (University of California Information Center, 2022a). URM students' admissions proportion to all students increased from 41.3% for fall 2020 to 43.5% for fall 2022 (University of California Office of the President, 2022d).</p> <p>The barriers faced by URM students include English language proficiency, discrimination and acculturation, student motivation and self-efficacy, academic preparation, work and family responsibilities, educators' negative or low expectations towards students, financial needs, and additional stress related to college preparation and increased selectivity (Capizzi et al., 2017; Cook et al., 2015; Erisman &amp; Looney, 2007; Guevara-Cruz, 2018; Pérusse et al., 2017; Princeton Review, 2022). Also, low self-efficacy, demotivation, and stress related to college application are also attributed to internalized oppression of long-term oppression of the U.S. higher education system experienced by the URM students (Axner, n.d.; David, 2013).</p> <p>There is not any study that examines how barriers faced by URM students during their college planning and application processes have changed after UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement. The sub-question is designed to ask for unknown or emerging barriers during this unprecedented era with the pandemic and UC's admissions policy reform.</p>

*Note.* At the time of construction of this protocol, from April 2022 to June 2022, UC's Regents Policy 2103 had not been rescinded. See reference and copyright information at the end of Table 8.

**Table 8 (Continued)**

*The Focus Group Protocol Constructs*

Question	Construct	Citation
<p>6. What do you think of UC Regents Policy 2103’s policy reform?</p> <p>a. Who does the policy benefit and who does it hurt?</p>	<p>Student perspectives; policy implementation outcomes; higher education equity</p>	<p>The suspension of standardized test scores, which means that they would no longer be considered by the undergraduate admissions of the University of California, aims to address the existing education inequalities in the University of California and the state under the severe impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (University of California Office of the President, 2020, May 21).</p> <p>Holding the diversity statement that “the knowledge that the University of California is open to qualified students from all groups, and thus serves all parts of the community equitably, helps sustain the social fabric of the State,” the University of California Board of Regents proceeded from reduced importance of SAT and ACT consideration to no SAT/ACT consideration (University of California Board of Regents, 2020).</p>
<p>7. According to the federal, state, and UC’s mission statements, equity means equal opportunity of accessing education through removing barriers and addressing long-term disparities faced by underrepresented minority students. Do you think this policy reform has or has not advanced higher education equity? Please explain.</p>	<p>Higher education equity</p>	<p>For this qualitative study that examines the influence of UC’s admission policy reform, higher education equity’s definition integrates the federal, state, and UC’s mission statements related to equity: equal opportunity of accessing higher education through removing barriers and addressing long-term disparities faced by underrepresented minority students.</p>

*Note.* At the time of construction of this protocol, from April 2022 to June 2022, UC’s Regents Policy 2103 had not been rescinded. See reference and copyright information at the end of Table 8.



**Table 8 (Continued)**

*The Focus Group Protocol Constructs*

Question	Construct	Citation
8. This study aims to explore the impact of UC’s elimination of the standardized tests requirement from perspectives and experiences of URM students. Do you have any final thoughts to share with us today? Or have we missed anything?	Discussion question; research validity	This question asks for unexplored or missing topics related to the research question.

*Note.* At the time of construction of this protocol, from April 2022 to June 2022, UC’s Regents Policy 2103 had not been rescinded. This protocol was developed with references to “Rethinking Admissions: US Public Universities in the Post-Affirmative Action Age”, by R. C. Atkinson, & P. A. Pelfrey, 2004, *The University of California Office of the President: Presidential and Scientific Papers—Richard Atkinson*, <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2w60b2x4>, Copyright 2004 by Richard C. Atkinson and Patricia A. Pelfrey; *Section 3. Healing From the Effects of Internalized Oppression*, by Axner, M., n.d., Community Tool Box, <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/culture/cultural-competence/healing-from-interalized-oppression/main>, copyright by University of Kansas; *Crossing the Finish Line: Completing College at America’s Public Universities*, by W. G. Bowen, M. M. Chingos, & M. S. McPherson, 2009, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt7rp39>, copyright 2009 by Princeton University Press; “Promoting Low-income Students’ Readiness, Well-being, and Success: A Gear Up Counseling Program Study”, by L. M. Capizzi, C. H. Hofstetter, D.D. Mena, B. Duckor, & X. Hu, 2017, *Journal of School Counseling*, 15(3), 1-26, <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1144755>, copyright 2017 by College of Education, Health & Human Development, Montana State University; “Promoting College Access Among Latina/O English Language Learners: Implications for Professional School Counselors”, by A. L. Cook, R. Pérusse, & E. D. Rojas, 2015, *Journal of School Counseling*, 13(18), 1-43, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1076446.pdf>, copyright 2015 by College of Education, Health & Human Development, Montana State University; *Internalized Oppression: The Psychology of Marginalized Groups* (1st ed.), by E. J. R. David, 2013, copyright 2013 by Springer Publishing Company; “Diversity outcomes of test-optional policies”, by T. J. Espenshade, & C. Y. Chung, 2011, in J. A. Soares (Ed.), *SAT Wars: The Case for Test-optional College Admissions*, pp. 177–200, copyright 2011 by Teachers College Press; “English Learners’ Appropriation of English Language Policy at a U.S. university”, by R. Fuentes, 2019, *International Multilingual Research Journal*, 14(3), 233–247, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19313152.2019.1684422>, copyright 2019 by Routledge; “Experiences of Adolescents as They Navigate the Competitive College-going Culture”, by K. L. Grant, 2020, *Journal of School Counseling*, 18(27), <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1281471.pdf>, copyright 2020 by College of Education, Health & Human Development, Montana State University; “The Importance of College-Going Culture for Latinos Prior to High School”, by G. Guevara-Cruz, 2018, *Harvard Journal of Hispanic Policy*, 30, 63-72, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A634429522/AONE?u=googlescholar&sid=googleScholar&xid=bc350530>, copyright 2018 by President and Fellows of Harvard College, through the John F. Kennedy School of Government; “Opening the Door to the American Dream: Increasing Higher Education Access and Success for Immigrants”, by W. Erisman, & S. Looney, 2007, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED497030.pdf>, copyright 2007 by Institute for Higher Education Policy; “Understanding the Experiences of Provisionally Admitted Black Male College Students in the State of Georgia”, by N. Jackson, H. Fiestler, & J. L. Workman, 2019, *Georgia Journal of College Student Affairs*, 35(1), <https://doi.org/10.20429/gcpa.2019.350104>, copyright 2019 by Georgia Journal of College Student Affairs; “Validity of the SAT® for Predicting First-Year College Grade Point Average”, by J. L. Kobrin, B. F., Patterson, E. J. Shaw, K. D. Mattern, & S. M. Barbuti, 2008, *College Board*, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED563202.pdf>, copyright 2008 by The College Board; “School Counseling: Partnering With a School District to Provide Postsecondary Opportunities for First-Generation, Low Income, and Students of Color”, by R. Pérusse, N. DeRonck, & J. Parzych, 2017, *Psychology in the Schools*, 54(10), 1222–1228, <https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.22084>, copyright 2017 by Wiley Periodicals, LLC; “How Much do They Know? An Examination of Student Perceptions of University Cutbacks”, by B. A. Postlewaite, & J. A. Frankland, 2021, *Journal of Higher Education Theory and Practice*, 21(6), <https://doi.org/10.33423/jhetp.v21i6.4388>, copyright 2021 by Journal of Higher Education Theory and Practice; *2022 College Hopes & Worries Survey Report*, <https://www.princetonreview.com/college-rankings/college-hopes-worries>, by Princeton Review, 2022, copyright 2022 by 2023 TPR Education IP Holdings, LLC; “Test-based Accountability, Standardized Testing and Minority/Racialized Students’ Perspectives in Urban Schools in Canada and Australia”, by G. Rezai-Rashti, & B. Lingard, 2021, *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 42(5), 716-731, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2020.1843112>, copyright 2021 by Routledge; “Experiences of Successful First-generation College Students With College Access”, by J. R. Ricks, & J. M. Warren, 2021, *Journal of Educational Research & Practice*, 11(1), 1–15, <https://doi.org/10.5590/JERAP.2021.11.1.01>, copyright 2021 by Jonathan R. Ricks and Jeffrey M. Warren; “The SAT: Quantifying the Unfairness Behind the Bubbles”, by J. Rosner, 2011, in J. A. Soares (Ed.), *SAT Wars: The Case for Test-optional College Admissions*, pp. 104–117, copyright 2011 by Teachers College Press; “For Tests that are Predictively Powerful and Without Social Prejudice”, by J. A. Soares, 2012, *Research & Practice in Assessment*, 7, 5–11, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1062726.pdf>, copyright 2012 by Research & Practice in Assessment; *Partial Suspension of Regents Policy 2103*, by University of California Board of Regents, 2020, <https://regents.universityofcalifornia.edu/minutes/2020/board5.21.pdf>, copyright 2020 by Regents of the University of California; *Fall Enrollment at a Glance [Data Set]*, by University of California Information Center, 2022b, copyright 2023 by The Regents of the University of California; *University of California Board of Regents Unanimously Approved Changes to Standardized Testing Requirement for Undergraduates*, by University of California Office of the President, 2020, May 21, <https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/press-room/university-california-board-regents-approves-changes-standardized-testing-requirement>, copyright 2020 by Regents of the University of California; *Table 2.1 University of California Freshman Admissions by Campus and Race/Ethnicity Fall 2020, 2021, and 2022 [Data Set]*, by University of California Office of the President, 2022d, copyright 2023 by University of California Office of the President, Graduate, Undergraduate and Equity Affairs, Admissions.

Table 9 presents the constructs of the interview protocol:

**Table 9**

*The Interview Protocol Constructs*

Question	Construct	Citation
1. To start with, how would you describe your college planning and application experience?	Phenomenology research	This is an opening question to build rapport. There are a number of studies that understand students' experiences and perceptions, many of which use phenomenological approaches, to examine the effects and influences of an education policy implementation or provide implications and strategies for policy makers and institution leaders to improve policy effectiveness (Fuentes, 2019; Grant, 2020; Jackson et al., 2019; Postlewaite & Frankland, 2021; Rezai-Rashti & Lingard, 2021; Ricks & Warren, 2021).
2. How do you think the SAT and other standardized tests reflect students' learning aptitude and can predict your college success? a. Did you take the SAT or other standardized tests? If so, what have you done to prepare for the SAT or other standardized tests? b. How do you think the SAT may add barriers to URM students in their college planning and application process?	SAT and other standardized tests' validity and intrinsic discrimination.	Studies for the SAT and other standardized tests indicates that the exams have limited predicting power on students' aptitude and college success and decrease diversity of college admissions when the tests are required (Atkinson & Geiser, 2009; Kobrin et al., 2008; Rosner, 2011; Soares, 2012). Further, the SAT is intrinsically exclusive and discriminatory against non-White, non-male students (Bowen et al., 2009; Espenshade & Chuang, 2011; Soares, 2012).

*Note.* At the time of construction of this protocol, from April 2022 to June 2022, UC's Regents Policy 2103 had not been rescinded. See reference and copyright information at the end of Table 9.

**Table 9 (Continued)**

*The Interview Protocol Constructs*

Question	Construct	Citation
<p>3. What do you think of the University of California’s Regents Policy 2103’s policy reform that suspends the SAT and other standardized tests requirements?</p> <p>a. Who does the policy benefit and who does it hurt?</p> <p>b. How do you think it benefited you?</p> <p>How do you think it benefited other URM students?</p>	<p>Student perspectives; policy implementation outcomes; higher education equity.</p>	<p>The suspension of standardized test scores, which means that they would no longer be considered by the undergraduate admissions of the University of California, aims to address the existing education inequalities in the University of California and the state under the severe impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (University of California Office of the President, 2020, May 21). Holding the diversity statement that “the knowledge that the University of California is open to qualified students from all groups, and thus serves all parts of the community equitably, helps sustain the social fabric of the State,” the University of California Board of Regents proceeded from reduced importance of SAT and ACT consideration to no SAT/ACT consideration (University of California Board of Regents, 2020).</p>
<p>4. How did/have your perspectives or feelings about college planning and application changed after knowing UC suspended the SAT and other standardized tests requirements?</p> <p>a. How and when did you know about the policy?</p> <p>b. Do you feel more confident or less confident of applying and entering a selective, four-year college? And what gives you that level of confidence (or lack of confidence)?</p> <p>c. Did you feel more stressed or less stressed about applying and entering a selective, four-year college? And what gives you that level of stress (or reduced stress)?</p>	<p>Student perspectives and attitudes; student motivation and self-efficacy; stress and anxiety.</p>	<p>With increasing selectivity of the U.S. higher education, some school counselors have observed the increased pressure related to college planning and application for all students, along with more stress, anxiety, and exhaustion (Princeton Review, 2022).</p> <p>Cook et al. (2015) studied the multiple barriers faced by Latinx language learner students (Latinx ELL students) for them to get into college: discrimination and acculturation stress, student motivation and self-efficacy, educators’ negative or low expectations towards students, and college readiness and financing. Many of these barriers faced by immigrant students are also faced by low-income and first-generation college students in the United States. Also, low self-efficacy, demotivation, and stress related to college application are also attributed to internalized oppression of long-term oppression of the U.S. higher education system experienced by the URM students (Axner, n.d.; David, 2013).</p> <p>This question explores how URM students’ motivation, self-efficacy, stress and anxiety level have changed after the policy implementation are unknown.</p>

*Note.* At the time of construction of this protocol, from April 2022 to June 2022, UC’s Regents Policy 2103 had not been rescinded. See reference and copyright information at the end of Table 9.

**Table 9 (Continued)**

*The Interview Protocol Constructs*

Question	Construct	Citation
<p>5. From your experience, what barriers have you faced during your college planning and application process?</p> <p>a. Are there any barriers related to your racial, income, and/or first-gen status? Please explain.</p>	<p>College application and access barriers</p>	<p>The barriers faced by URM students include English language proficiency, discrimination and acculturation, student motivation and self-efficacy, academic preparation, work and family responsibilities, educators’ negative or low expectations towards students, financial needs, and additional stress related to college preparation and increased selectivity (Capizzi et al., 2017; Cook et al., 2015; Erisman &amp; Looney, 2007; Guevara-Cruz, 2018; Pérusse et al., 2017; Princeton Review, 2022).</p>
<p>6. How did/ have your college planning and application process changed after the implementation of the University of California’s Regents Policy 2103’s policy reform?</p> <p>a. What barriers are removed after UC’s policy implementation of no consideration of standardized tests?</p> <p>b. What barriers are alleviated after UC’s policy implementation of no consideration of standardized tests?</p>	<p>Policy reform outcomes; College application and access barriers; COVID-19 pandemic’s impact.</p>	<p>The URM applicants number jumped from 50,621 for 2020 fall to 59,818 for 2022 fall, and their admissions number from 33,012 for 2020 fall to 37,134 for 2022 fall (University of California Information Center, 2022a). URM students’ admissions proportion to all students increased from 41.3% for fall 2020 to 43.5% for fall 2022 (University of California Office of the President, 2022d).</p> <p>The barriers faced by URM students include English language proficiency, discrimination and acculturation, student motivation and self-efficacy, academic preparation, work and family responsibilities, educators’ negative or low expectations towards students, financial needs, and additional stress related to college preparation and increased selectivity (Capizzi et al., 2017; Cook et al., 2015; Erisman &amp; Looney, 2007; Guevara-Cruz, 2018; Pérusse et al., 2017; Princeton Review, 2022).</p> <p>There is not any study that examines how barriers faced by URM students during their college planning and application processes have changed after UC eliminated the standardized tests requirement. This question aims to find out this unexplored topic.</p>

*Note.* At the time of construction of this protocol, from April 2022 to June 2022, UC’s Regents Policy 2103 had not been rescinded. See reference and copyright information at the end of Table 9.

**Table 9 (Continued)**  
*The Interview Protocol Constructs*

Question	Construct	Citation
<p>6. How did/ have your college planning and application process changed after the implementation of the University of California’s Regents Policy 2103’s policy reform?</p> <p>c. What barriers are removed after UC’s policy implementation of no consideration of standardized tests?</p> <p>d. What barriers are alleviated after UC’s policy implementation of no consideration of standardized tests?</p>	<p>Policy reform outcomes;            College application and access barriers;            COVID-19 pandemic’s impact.</p>	<p>The URM applicants number jumped from 50,621 for 2020 fall to 59,818 for 2022 fall, and their admissions number from 33,012 for 2020 fall to 37,134 for 2022 fall (University of California Information Center, 2022a). URM students’ admissions proportion to all students increased from 41.3% for fall 2020 to 43.5% for fall 2022 (University of California Office of the President, 2022d).</p> <p>The barriers faced by URM students include English language proficiency, discrimination and acculturation, student motivation and self-efficacy, academic preparation, work and family responsibilities, educators’ negative or low expectations towards students, financial needs, and additional stress related to college preparation and increased selectivity (Capizzi et al., 2017; Cook et al., 2015; Erisman &amp; Looney, 2007; Guevara-Cruz, 2018; Pérusse et al., 2017; Princeton Review, 2022).</p> <p>There is not any study that examines how barriers faced by URM students during their college planning and application processes have changed after UC eliminated the standardized tests requirement. This question aims to find out this unexplored topic.</p>
<p>7. Did you have sufficient guidance or resources in the process of college planning and application?</p> <p>a. [If Yes] What guidance or resources did you rely on?</p> <p>b. [If Yes or No] Who was involved in providing these guidance and resources to you throughout the college planning and application process?</p> <p>c. [If Yes or No] What challenges did you encounter to acquire college planning and application guidance and resources?</p> <p>d. [If No] What guidance or resources were not available?</p>	<p>Student experiences;            College Counseling Practices that support URM students</p>	<p>Sackett et al. (2018) applied a phenomenological/constructivist approach to learn about high school students’ perceptions and meaningful experiences from school counseling. The study finds that “the relationship with school counselors, characteristics of school counselors, benefits received from school counselors, and collaboration with school counselors” are the four themes from students’ perceived meaningful experiences (Sackett et al., 2018).</p> <p>Johnson (2017) also developed activities of the four counseling practices based on the CARE model (“cultivating strengths, acknowledging realities, removing barriers, and expanding strengths”) for students from poverty. They are school-community collaboration, counseling core curriculum, small group counseling, and individual counseling/planning. Among these four practices, the last three practices are led by counselors.</p>

*Note.* At the time of construction of this protocol, from April 2022 to June 2022, UC’s Regents Policy 2103 had not been rescinded. See reference and copyright information at the end of Table 9.

**Table 9 (Continued)**

*The Interview Protocol Constructs*

Question	Construct	Citation
<p>8. Were there new barriers to your college planning and application process that emerged after UC’s policy implementation of no consideration of standardized tests?</p> <p>a. Were there new barriers of your college planning and application experience that emerged during or related to the COVID-19 pandemic?</p>	<p>Policy reform outcomes; College application and access barriers; COVID-19 pandemic’s impact.</p>	<p>There are not any published studies that explore students’ experiences and perceptions of the college planning and application process after the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak and UC’s elimination of the standardized tests requirement. Expectedly, UC’s policy reform removes some college preparation and access barriers related to test preparation for URM students. However, this question is designed to ask for unknown or emerging barriers during this unprecedented era with the pandemic and UC’s admissions policy reform.</p>
<p>9. According to the federal, state, and UC’s mission statements, equity means equal opportunity of accessing education through removing barriers and addressing long-term disparities faced by underrepresented minority students. Would you agree or disagree that UC’s suspension of standardized tests advances higher education equity? Please explain.</p>	<p>Discussion question; research validity</p>	<p>For this qualitative study that examines the influence of UC’s admission policy reform, higher education equity’s definition integrates the federal, state, and UC’s mission statements related to equity: equal opportunity of accessing higher education through removing barriers and addressing long-term disparities faced by underrepresented minority students (The White House, n.d.; University of California Board of Regents, 2020; University of California Office of the General Counsel, 2015; U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).</p>

*Note.* At the time of construction of this protocol, from April 2022 to June 2022, UC’s Regents Policy 2103 had not been rescinded. See reference and copyright information at the end of Table 9.

**Table 9 (Continued)**  
*The Interview Protocol Constructs*

<p>10. How well do you feel that you are prepared for completing college and acquiring a bachelor’s degree? Please explain.</p> <p>a. How confident are you about completing college? And what gives you that level of confidence (or lack of confidence)?</p> <p>b. What are some concerns that you have about completing college?</p>	<p>Higher education equity</p>	<p>This study and its definition of higher education considers only the entrance and access to higher education of URM students. However, it is completing college and acquiring a bachelor’s degree that eventually helps individuals improving their socio-economic status and living quality. Therefore, the answer to this question is used to give indications of college success and degree completion.</p>
---	--------------------------------	---

*Note.* This protocol was developed with references to “Rethinking Admissions: US Public Universities in the Post-Affirmative Action Age”, by R. C. Atkinson, & P. A. Pelfrey, 2004, *The University of California Office of the President: Presidential and Scientific Papers—Richard Atkinson*, <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2w60b2x4>, Copyright 2004 by Richard C. Atkinson and Patricia A. Pelfrey; *Section 3. Healing From the Effects of Internalized Oppression*, by Axner, M., n.d., Community Tool Box, <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/culture/cultural-competence/healing-from-internalized-oppression/main>, copyright by University of Kansas; *Crossing the Finish Line: Completing College at America’s Public Universities*, by W. G. Bowen, M. M. Chingos, & M. S. McPherson, 2009, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt7rp39>, copyright 2009 by Princeton University Press; “Promoting Low-income Students’ Readiness, Well-being, and Success: A Gear Up Counseling Program Study”, by L. M. Capizzi, C. H. Hofstetter, D.D. Mena, B. Duckor, & X. Hu, 2017, *Journal of School Counseling*, 15(3), 1-26, <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1144755>, copyright 2017 by College of Education, Health & Human Development, Montana State University; “Promoting College Access Among Latina/O English Language Learners: Implications for Professional School Counselors”, by A. L. Cook, R. Pérusse, & E. D. Rojas, 2015, *Journal of School Counseling*, 13(18), 1-43, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1076446.pdf>, copyright 2015 by College of Education, Health & Human Development, Montana State University; *Internalized Oppression: The Psychology of Marginalized Groups* (1st ed.), by E. J. R. David, 2013, copyright 2013 by Springer Publishing Company; “Diversity outcomes of test-optional policies”, by T. J. Espenshade, & C. Y. Chung, 2011, in J. A. Soares (Ed.), *SAT Wars: The Case for Test-optional College Admissions*, pp. 177–200, copyright 2011 by Teachers College Press; “English Learners’ Appropriation of English Language Policy at a U.S. university”, by R. Fuentes, 2019, *International Multilingual Research Journal*, 14(3), 233–247, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19313152.2019.1684422>, copyright 2019 by Routledge; “Experiences of Adolescents as They Navigate the Competitive College-going Culture”, by K. L. Grant, 2020, *Journal of School Counseling*, 18(27), <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1281471.pdf>, copyright 2020 by College of Education, Health & Human Development, Montana State University; “The Importance of College-Going Culture for Latinos Prior to High School”, by G. Guevara-Cruz, 2018, *Harvard Journal of Hispanic Policy*, 30, 63-72, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A634429522/AONE?u=googlescholar&sid=bc350530>, copyright 2018 by President and Fellows of Harvard College, through the John F. Kennedy School of Government; “Opening the Door to the American Dream: Increasing Higher Education Access and Success for Immigrants”, by W. Erisman, & S. Looney, 2007, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED497030.pdf>, copyright 2007 by Institute for Higher Education Policy; “Understanding the Experiences of Provisionally Admitted Black Male College Students in the State of Georgia”, by N. Jackson, H. Fiester, & J. L. Workman, 2019, *Georgia Journal of College Student Affairs*, 35(1), <https://doi.org/10.20429/gcpa.2019.350104>, copyright 2019 by Georgia Journal of College Student Affairs; “Validity of the SAT® for Predicting First-Year College Grade Point Average”, by J. L. Kobrin, B. F., Patterson, E. J. Shaw, K. D. Mattern, & S. M. Barbuti, 2008, *College Board*, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED563202.pdf>, copyright 2008 by The College Board; “School Counseling: Partnering With a School District to Provide Postsecondary Opportunities for First-Generation, Low Income, and Students of Color”, by R. Pérusse, N. DeRonck, & J. Parzych, 2017, *Psychology in the Schools*, 54(10), 1222–1228, <https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.22084>, copyright 2017 by Wiley Periodicals, LLC; “How Much do They Know? An Examination of Student Perceptions of University Cutbacks”, by B. A. Postlewaite, & J. A. Frankland, 2021, *Journal of Higher Education Theory and Practice*, 21(6), <https://doi.org/10.33423/jhetp.v21i6.4388>, copyright 2021 by Journal of Higher Education Theory and Practice; *2022 College Hopes & Worries Survey Report*, <https://www.princetonreview.com/college-rankings/college-hopes-worries>, by Princeton Review, 2022, copyright 2022 by 2023 TPR Education IP Holdings, LLC; “Test-based Accountability, Standardized Testing and Minority/Racialized Students’ Perspectives in Urban Schools in Canada and Australia”, by G. Rezai-Rashti, & B. Lingard, 2021, *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 42(5), 716-731, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2020.1843112>, copyright 2021 by Routledge; “Experiences of Successful First-generation College Students With College Access”, by J. R. Ricks, & J. M. Warren, 2021, *Journal of Educational Research & Practice*, 11(1), 1–15, <https://doi.org/10.5590/JERAP.2021.11.1.01>, copyright 2021 by Jonathan R. Ricks and Jeffrey M. Warren; “The SAT: Quantifying the Unfairness Behind the Bubbles”, by J. Rosner, 2011, in J. A. Soares (Ed.), *SAT Wars: The Case for Test-optional College Admissions*, pp. 104–117, copyright 2011 by Teachers College Press; “For Tests That are Predictively Powerful and Without Social Prejudice”, by J. A. Soares, 2012, *Research & Practice in Assessment*, 7, 5–11, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1062726.pdf>, copyright 2012 by Research & Practice in Assessment; *Partial Suspension of Regents Policy 2103*, by University of California Board of Regents, 2020, <https://regents.universityofcalifornia.edu/minutes/2020/board5.21.pdf>, copyright 2020 by Regents of the University of California; *Fall Enrollment at a Glance* [data set], by University of California Information Center, 2022b, copyright 2023 by The Regents of the University of California; *University of California Board of Regents Unanimously Approved Changes to Standardized Testing Requirement for Undergraduates*, by University of California Office of the President, 2020, May 21, <https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/press-room/university-california-board-regents-approves-changes-standardized-testing-requirement>, copyright 2020 by Regents of the University of California; *Table 2.1 University of California Freshman Admissions by Campus and Race/Ethnicity Fall 2020, 2021, and 2022 [Data Set]*, by University of California Office of the President, 2022d, copyright 2023 by University of California Office of the President, Graduate, Undergraduate and Equity Affairs, Admissions; “School Counselors Supporting the Career and College Preparedness of Students From Poverty: Using The Care Model,” by G. S. Johnson, 2017, *Journal of School Counseling*, 15(18), 1-27, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1162226.pdf>, copyright 2017 College of Education, Health & Human Development, Montana State University; “A Phenomenological Inquiry of High School Students’ Meaningful Experiences With School Counselors” by C. R. Sackett, L. B. Farmer, & K. B. Moran, 2018, *Journal of School Counseling*, 16(19), 1-31, <http://www.jsc.montana.edu/articles/v16n19.pdf>, copyright 2018 College of Education, Health & Human Development, Montana State University.

The questions in the survey addressed the SAT and ACT, barriers to the college planning and application process, UC's admissions policy reform, and higher education equity. The probing questions under the main questions were asked to deepen the conversation and elicit more ideas from a participant. For questions 4, 5, and 10, a few probing questions were added based on the emergent and uncovered themes from the two focus groups.

Specifically, probing question 4a was added after two focus groups as an emergent theme arose: Many participants from the focus group conversations did not know about the policy right away/in their sophomore year, but in their junior and even senior years. The source of information about the policy was not always school counselors; oftentimes, the information came from teachers, parents, and/or friends. The answer to 4a could influence and contribute to a participant's college planning and application experiences. Question 5a was added after the two focus groups, as the participants' discourse about their barriers to college planning and application reflected the intersectionality of CRT. Specifically, URM students who were from low-income families and/or first-generation college students revealed more barriers than those who were not.

This study and its definition of higher education equity considered only the entrance and access to higher education of URM students. However, completing college and acquiring a bachelor's degree that eventually contributes to individuals' progression with their socioeconomic status, living quality, and lifelong earnings. Therefore, the last question asked for participants' readiness to complete college and acquire bachelor's degrees. Probing questions 10a and 10b were also added after the focus groups. While the themes of self-efficacy and stress were frequently mentioned, some participants mentioned them related to standardized tests and



other college application components. In contrast, others addressed the themes in the context of getting admitted and/or starting enrolled in a selective university, suggesting their continued vulnerability to the multi-layered systematic oppression of higher education. Thus, the two probing questions were added for further inquiry into the insights and stories of students' feelings and perceptions of college success.

### **Reliability**

Given the data collection methods, I assumed that URM students who got into one of the highly selective UC campuses—especially those without standardized tests—held positive attitudes toward the UC admission policy reform. Contrarily, URM students who applied but did not successfully get into one of the highly selective UC campuses—or any UC campuses—may have held different attitudes towards UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement and its effectiveness of equity advancement. Therefore, the participants who agreed to join the interviews (13 out of 14 participants were admitted to at least one UC campus) may be likely to hold more positive attitudes towards the UC's admissions policy reform compared with those who did not participate.

Nevertheless, given the nature of the phenomenology research study, the data collected was reliable. The participants were asked to share their own perspectives and lived experiences of the college planning and application process. The questions were carefully designed to be non-leading and avoid bias in the answers. The researcher assumed that some college planning and application barriers for URM students had been removed by UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement, and the responses provided insight into how and why the policy reform had advanced higher education equity in UC's admissions system. Nevertheless, there

was also a question asking about emerging and uncovered barriers in the research context. Both focus groups and 14 interviews followed through with the protocol questions. The researcher completed the data management, coding, and analysis process individually, so there was no concern of inter-coder instability or inconsistency.

### **Validity and Trustworthiness**

The participants were recruited from Instagram ([www.instagram.com](http://www.instagram.com)). With a digital gift card of \$25.00 awarded through email, each student participant could only be willing to commit their time with the motivation and good faith to their share counter-stories and voices of URM students and contribute to a study seeking to understand the influences of a specific higher education admissions policy on equity advancement. The researcher was not previously acquainted with any of the participants; thus, the recruitment method and purposeful participant selection ensured the data source's trustworthiness.

The instrument construction process also considered validation. Intersectionality was considered for this study. The methodology design and the complexity of the URM students' experiences and perspectives on their college planning and application processes were reviewed through literature and foreseen by the researcher. Also, the first eight questions of the interview protocol were all constructed based on the literature review to ensure validity. The last question of the focus group protocol asked for any missing information or comments. This question was designed to add validity to the focus groups, and it did give opportunities for participants to uncover the topics and themes from previous questions. Further, after recognizing uncovered themes from the two focus groups, the researcher updated the interview protocol by adding a few probing questions under questions 4, 5, and 10. Moreover, this critical policy analysis only

focused on URM students' college planning and application experiences for UC campuses and their perceptions of higher education equity in UC's admissions system; Chapter 4 provides detailed descriptions from the data analysis for readers to determine the transferability and generalizability of the study.

### **Qualitative Data Analysis**

While the CRT tenet of experiential knowledge through counter-storytelling inspired the research design of this study, the theoretical foundations of data analysis focused on a few other tenets of CRT—normality and permanence of racism, the social construction of racism, intersectionality—and combined the internalized oppression theory, as the theme surrounding this theory emerged during the third phase of data analysis (Axner, n.d.; Crenshaw 1995; David, 2013; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Matsuda et al., 1993; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015).

Among the 14 participants were URM students, nine (64.29%) were first-generation college students, 10 (71.43%) were low-income students, and seven (50%) were URM students with intersectional identities of both low-income and first-generation. Therefore, these URM student participants' experiences of college planning and application after UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement and their perceptions of selective, four-year higher education equity in UC's admissions system provided solid evidence and content for data analysis based on the tenets mentioned above. With both critical and descriptive goals, the findings of this critical policy analysis research provide counter-stories of URM students and those with intersectional identities based on class and parent education. Further, the findings are discussed and compared with UC admissions data of non-URM students after the policy reform's implementation to give

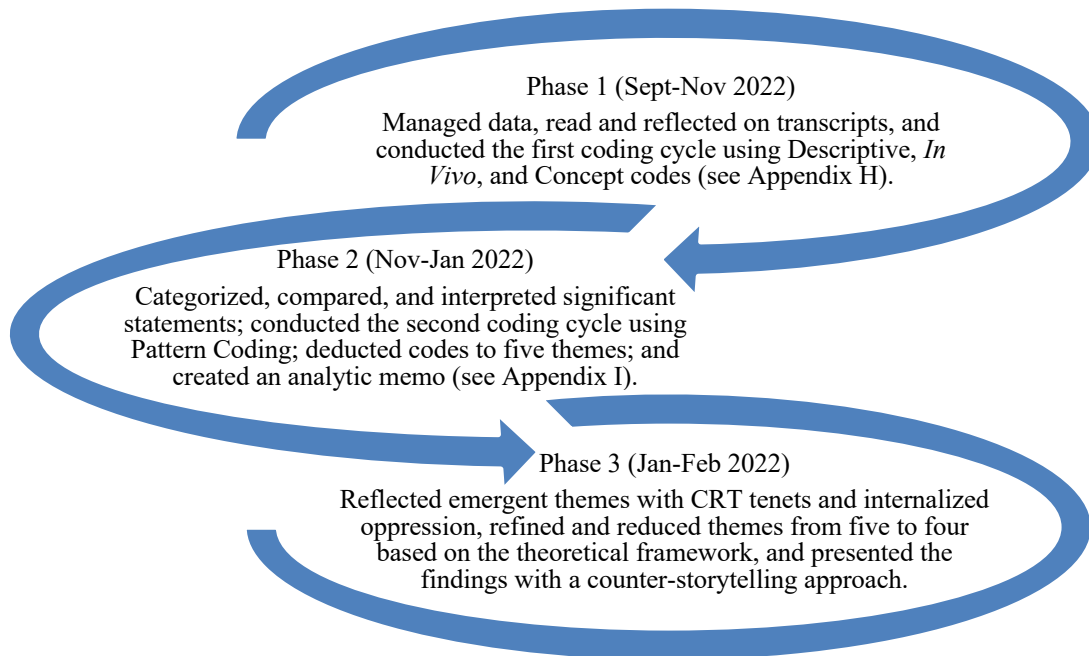
indications on interest convergence and complexity of higher education admissions equity (Bell, 1995a; 1995b).

### Data Analysis Procedures

As presented in Figure 1, the model involves three phases. I began the first phase of data analysis with secure data storage. I read through the interview transcripts and critical ideas, familiarized myself with all the data, and took notes using fundamental concepts and short phrases to describe participants' personal experiences. Then, I conducted the first coding cycle, combining three methods: descriptive, *in vivo*, and concept coding (Miles et al., 2018; Saldaña, 2021).

#### Figure 1

*Three Phases of the Data Analysis*



*Note* : The data analysis plan was developed based on the Data Analysis Spiral model presented by J. W. Creswell, 2013, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (3rd ed.). SAGE, copyright 2013 by SAGE Inc.

For the first cycle of coding, I had more than thirty codes. Some codes were preexisting and aligned with theories and concepts from the literature review—financial barriers for standardized tests, access to test preparation resources, counselor’s role, self-efficacy, stress, first-generation college student, family support, etc. However, since there was a gap in the literature on URM students’ perspectives and experiences of college application after UC’s admission policy reform implementation and during the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, many emergent codes exist that were not covered or studied in the literature review: time constraint, student decision, teachers’ role, peers’ role, etc. During the first coding cycle, I continuously aggregated the significant statements and coded all the responses to each interview question.

In this second coding cycle, I repeatedly interpreted the significant statements, reflected and compared different codes, and formed five themes that primarily addressed and shared by the participants: URM students’ barriers related to standardized tests; changes in URM students’ college planning and applications after the policy reform; URM students’ perceptions of the policy reform; perpetuating college application barriers faced by URM students and intersectionality; and transition to college/college readiness. Also, I counted the frequency of the codes, which indicated to some extent the magnitude of a code in the entire interpretation of the central phenomenon while keeping in mind that each code should be equally considered and emphasized and may represent different views (Creswell, 2013).

For the third phase, I engaged theories from the literature review to reflect and reorganize the codes into five large themes (see Appendix I). In both the second and third cycles, I applied double-coding, or simultaneous coding, when I recognized the interconnectedness among the codes and layers and the nuance of a passage of data (Saldaña, 2021). Besides the CRT tenets of

normality of racism, social construction of race and racism, and intersectionality, I realized that theories of internalized oppression can be especially useful for understanding the URM students' shifts of perceptions and changed behaviors after UC eliminated the standardized tests requirement (Axner, n.d.; Crenshaw, 1995; David, 2013; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Matsuda et al., 1993; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). Therefore, I confirmed my theoretical framework that combined CRT tenets and internalized oppression theory and reorganized the five codes into the four themes of my data analysis: (a) Insidiousness of Higher Education Racism: The Role of Standardized Testing in Admissions, (b) Internalized Oppression of the Legitimization of the Standardized Tests Requirement, (c) Intersectionality of Race, Income, First-Generation College Students, and Pandemic Experience, and (d) URM Students' Increased Trust in the System.

According to Creswell (2013), the essence of the central phenomenon incorporates textual descriptions of “what” the participants experienced and structural descriptions of “how” the experience happened. Therefore, for each of the four themes, I provided a detailed explanation of the shifts of the URM student participants' perceptions, decisions, and behaviors in the college planning and application process through rich and thick descriptions and interpretations of significant quotes. Additionally, I discussed the implication of these shifts regarding higher education admissions equity using CRT tenets and internalized oppression theories.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

#### Introduction

This critical policy analysis research explored the influences and outcomes of UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement from the perspectives and experiences of URM students. I recruited 14 URM student participants who all applied to the UC system for fall 2022. Then, I constructed and conducted demographic surveys, focus groups, and interviews to learn about the URM student participants' college planning and application experiences after the UC's admissions policy reform. From these counter-narratives, I analyzed URM student participants' perceptions and attitudes towards the policy reform, higher education admissions, and its equity and identified barriers that emerged and were removed before and after the policy reform and in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

After collecting survey results and transcribing the data from the focus groups and interviews, the researcher started three phases of data analysis. In the first phase, by reading and rereading the interview transcripts, I took notes on the URM students' perceptions and experiences, highlighted significant statements of each question, and used descriptive, *in vivo*, and concept coding for the first cycle of coding—a process for understanding and familiarizing myself with the lived experiences of URM students. In phase two, I categorized, compared, and interpreted URM students' perceptions and experiences through significant statements regarding the literature review, used pattern coding to revise the codebook, and created an analytic memo. In the third phase, I used tenets of critical race theory and the concept of internalized oppression to make meaning of the URM students' lived experiences. Through this cycle of coding, I

generated four emerging themes to critically analyze influences of UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement on URM students.

According to Delgado and Stefancic (2017), "Much of what we believe is ridiculous, self-serving, or cruel but is not perceived to be so at the time. Attacking embedded preconceptions that marginalize others or conceal their humanity is a legitimate function of all fiction" (p. 50). Based on this paradigm, this chapter provides phenomenological counter-stories of URM students' college planning and application process and critically analyzes how UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement broke URM students' internalized oppression, increased opportunities, fairness, and trust towards selective, four-year higher education admissions. The following sections restate research questions, present demographic survey results, introduce the four themes of the critical policy analysis, and elaborate on each theme by interpreting significant statements using CRT tenets and telling counter stories of URM students.

### **Research Questions**

Through analyzing and relaying counter-stories of the URM students using lenses of critical race theory, I sought to answer the following two research questions and discuss the influences of UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement on its selective, four-year higher education admissions equity:

1. What are the college planning and application experiences of URM students after UC eliminated the standardized tests requirement in its freshman admissions?
2. What are URM students' perceptions of higher education equity as a result of UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement in its freshman admissions?



## Demographic Survey Results

All participants in the study were URM students who applied for at least one UC campus and were enrolled in four-year colleges in fall 2022 as full-time freshmen students. Table 10 presents the demographic background of the 14 participants, all URM students:

**Table 10**

### *Participant Demographic Survey Results*

Pseudo-nyms	Gender	School enrolled	English as primary language	Pell Grants	First-gen college student	Race/ethnicity	Admitted UC schools	Prepared for SAT/ACT	Took SAT/ACT
Alexis	Female	UCLA	Yes	Yes	Yes	Hispanic/Latinx	UCLA, UC Berkeley, UC Irvine, UC San Diego	Only SAT	Only SAT
Chris	Male	UC San Diego	Yes	No	Yes	Hispanic/Latinx	UC San Diego, UC Riverside	Only SAT	Only SAT
Jordan	Male	UC Irvine	Yes	No	No	Black or African American	UCLA, UC Irvine, UC Riverside	Did not take either test	Did not take either test
Camila	Non-binary	UC Riverside	No	Yes	Yes	Hispanic/Latinx	UC Riverside	Only SAT	Only SAT
Erik	Male	UC Irvine	Yes	Yes	Yes	Hispanic/Latinx	UC Irvine, UC Riverside	Did not take either test	Did not take either test
Ava	Female	UC Irvine	Yes	Yes	Yes	Hispanic/Latinx, International, permanent resident	UC Irvine, UC Riverside	Did not take either test	Did not take either test
Maria	Female	UC Irvine	Yes	Yes	No	Hispanic/Latinx	UC Santa Barbara, UC Irvine, UC San Diego	Only SAT	Only SAT

**Table 10 (Continued)***Participant Demographic Survey Results*

Pseudo-nyms	Gender	School enrolled	English as primary language	Pell Grants	First-gen college student	Race/ethnicity	Admitted UC schools	Prepared for SAT/ACT	Took SAT/ACT
Natalia	Female	UC Riverside	Yes	No	Yes	Hispanic/Latinx	UC Riverside	Did not take either test	Did not take either test
Juliana	Female	UC Santa Cruz	Yes	Yes	No	Hispanic/Latinx	UC Santa Cruz	Only SAT	Only SAT
Diego	Male	UC Santa Cruz	Yes	Yes	Yes	Hispanic/Latinx	UC Santa Cruz	Only SAT	Only SAT
Paz	Male	CSU Long Beach	Yes	No	Yes	Hispanic/Latinx	None of the above	Only SAT	Only SAT
Lucas	Gender queer/Gender non-conforming	UC Riverside	Yes	Yes	Yes	White, Hispanic/Latinx	UC Riverside	Did not take either test	Did not take either test
Laila	Female	UC Davis	Yes	No	No	Black or African American	UC Santa Barbara, UC Davis	Did not take either test	Did not take either test
Isaac	Male	UC Riverside	Yes	Yes	Yes	Hispanic/Latinx	UC Riverside	Did not take either test	Did not take either test

Among these participants, nine (64.29%) were qualified for Pell Grants and identified as low-income students, 10 (71.43%) were first-generation college students, and seven (50%) were both first-generation college students and low-income students. Regarding the citizenship status, 13 participants were U.S. citizens, and one was a permanent resident and English language learner. As shown in Table 9, the participants are represented by pseudonyms given during the data collection process. In the following narratives of data analysis and findings, these pseudonyms are used to describe the experiences and perceptions of this research’s URM student participants.

Regarding standardized tests, half of the URM student participants prepared and took the SAT, while the other half did not. Meanwhile, among the seven student participants who took the test, three students attended highly selective UC campuses, three attended very or moderately selective UC campuses, and one did not get accepted to any UC campus and was enrolled in California State University, Long Beach at the time of this study. Among the other seven student participants who did not prepare for or take the SAT, three students were admitted and enrolled in highly selective UC campuses, and four students in very- or moderately selective UC campuses.

Such data indicates that after UC eliminated the standardized tests requirement, whether a freshman applicant took standardized tests does not necessarily affect the admissions and enrollment of URM students to UC campuses with different selectivity levels. In the following sections, I provide the counter-narratives of the URM student participants' college planning and application process and further critically interpret and analyze if and how UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement has reflected and advanced higher education equity through tenets of CRT.

### **Themes**

The data presentation and analysis applied the CRT tenets of permanence and normality of racism, the social construction of racism, counter-storytelling, and intersectionality. Through presenting and interpreting the URM student participants' perceptions and experiences of the college planning and application process, this study sought to provide a voice and over-arching counter-narrative for URM students in California.

After three phases of data analysis and three cycles of data coding, I identified the emergence of the following four themes:

1. Insidiousness of Higher Education Racism: The Role of Standardized Testing in Admissions,
2. Internalized Oppression of the Legitimization of the Standardized Tests Requirement,
3. Intersectionality of Race, Income, First-Generation College Students, and Pandemic Experience, and
4. URM Students' Increased Trust in UC's Admissions System.

Though alignment exists between the four themes and the literature review in Chapter 2, the findings of this research are unique in the context of UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement and within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and distance learning.

### **Insidiousness of Higher Education Racism: The Role of Standardized Testing in Admissions**

The SAT and ACT have two characteristics: (a) they are intrinsically racist, as the test questions, and content aligns with the background, culture, and living experiences of White students more than non-White students (Atkinson & Geiser, 2009; Kobrin et al., 2008; Rosner, 2011) and (b) the intrinsic racism of the SAT has long created a testing industrial complex that disproportionately monetizes for profit from URM students and low-income students in the public education system (Del Carmen Unda & Lizárraga-Dueñas, 2021; Soares, 2011; 2012). Due to these two characteristics, the previous UC freshman admissions policy that required standardized test scores perpetuated racism in higher education admissions. All of the URM

student participants of this research reflected that the SAT and ACT did not present students' learning aptitude; some URM students' unreasonably low-test scores and multiple financial and resource barriers related to test preparation provided evidence for the two characteristics.

### **Internalized Oppression of the Legitimization of the Standardized Tests Requirement**

URM students falsely perceived the SAT as almost the only—or most important—determinant to enter a four-year higher education institution. This false perception points to the URM students' internalized oppression of UC freshman admissions policy that required standardized tests for seven decades. Internally, the students believed the decades-long requirement of standardized tests was legitimate. Such internalized oppression has long made URM students experience low self-efficacy, demotivation, high stress, and/or fear toward four-year higher education applications. UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement alleviated internalized oppression of URM students: URM students became more confident, motivated, or hopeful of applying and attending four-year higher education; many changed their decisions and applied to selective, four-year universities.

### **Intersectionality of Race, Income, First-Generation College Students, and Pandemic Experience**

The intersectionality of underrepresented minority, low-income, and first-generation college student status has led to multi-layered barriers URM students face when applying and attending four-year higher education: financial barrier, lack of information and guidance, lack thereof of family support, and stress. Such barriers reflect multi-layered systematic oppression of four-year higher education institutions towards URM students. Although UC's admissions policy reform sought to reduce financial barriers related to standardized tests, it also disproportionately

affected students with intersectional identities of their race, class, and first-generation college students when accessing selective, four-year higher education.

While the policy reform motivated some URM students and low-income students to apply for selective, four-year higher education, the researcher found that URM students with intersectional identities—especially low-income first-generation college students—may still face multi-layered systematic oppression and barriers to eventually attain selective, four-year higher education even after getting accepted. Further, the unprecedented context of the COVID-19 pandemic and distant learning exaggerated financial and resource barriers experienced by URM students. A support system involving counselors, teachers, peers, and families was essential for these URM students with intersectional identities.

### **URM Students' Increased Trust in UC's Admissions System**

Before the UC's admissions policy reform, URM students had low trust in the higher education system or the admissions process, especially that of selective, four-year universities. Many participants did not have timely and accurate information about the policy reform from their counselors, and more than half of the participants did not believe UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement was true; and some participants even considered it as a rumor.

From the data analysis, the researcher found that UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement increased URM students' trust in the comprehensive review process of UC admissions. The policy reform deconstructed the false perceptions or discourse that standardized tests as the determining component of the comprehensive review process among URM students. Then, the students trusted and relied more on the school counselors and teachers to navigate their

college planning and application process and make decisions based on their information and suggestions.

After the policy reform, the URM students transformed their attitudes towards selective higher education and their admissions process: It had increased opportunities and fairness in the selective, four-year higher education admissions system. However, it is still too early to conclude that UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement advances higher education equity, as the increased opportunities come with increased competition and selectivity level of all UC campuses. Whether the enrolled URM students could successfully complete their college degree and whether the URM student applicants in the following years continuously access and increase their representations in selective, four-year universities were explored by this research.

In the following subsections, I present detailed and extensive content analyses for each of the four emerging themes with examples and direct quotes from transcriptions of URM student participants' interviews.

## **Insidiousness of Higher Education Racism: The Role of Standardized Testing in Admissions**

### ***Intrinsic Racism of the SAT***

All the URM student participants agreed that the SAT/ACT tests inaccurately reflect students' learning aptitude. There were three aspects included in the participants' reasoning: First, the SAT only tests students in the subjects of English and Mathematics, so it could put students who are language learners and/or who are not good at these subjects at a disadvantage in college applications—even if the students do not plan to study either subject. Thus, the SAT does not necessarily predict a student's success in college. For example, Isaac was a music student

who enrolled in UC Riverside as a freshman in fall 2022 and identified as a Mexican American, low-income, and first-generation college student. One barrier that the SAT brought to underrepresented minority students that Isaac pointed out was that the test was only and entirely in English, which put English language learners at a disadvantage:

I think it's pretty much kind of unfair, that they only required like, the students have like art to take a test that's only English, because I understand in some minority groups, like, you know, English is not mainly their first language. And so they'll have difficulties when it comes to like, reading especially and I feel like just having like, no, the test entirely only in English will create, like huge amounts of disadvantage is for minority groups. (Isaac)

Another participant, Camila—a low-income first-generation college student and English language learner who enrolled in UC Riverside in fall 2022—pointed out that the SAT tested materials that were not covered in her school courses. Further, she described how her weakness in math and lack of resources and tutoring for additional learning and test preparation created a disadvantage for college applications:

The SAT, and other standardized tests don't really reflect student's learning aptitude, I feel like there's a lot of things to really put in fact, that they really didn't factor. For example, there's certain topics that they mentioned in my SAT that I hadn't learned that yet that year, or that it was just meant, never really talked about. Or it also measures both reading, writing, and math. And for me, personally, I am, math is one of my weakest subjects. And I feel like to be put within that standard against a lot of other students who have resources to practice their math, to really get tutors to really enhance themselves to learn that topic while I don't, I feel like it just gives an unfair disadvantage to a lot of students who don't have the same resources. (Camila)

Further, even with language proficiency, Natalia—a Latinx first-generation college student at UC Riverside—also discussed how the SAT tested materials that students did not learn or have access to in their high school:

A lot of teachers don't really teach, or don't really have those SAT prep courses, so the SATs kind of give different materials based on what we're learning what we're actually learning based on the curriculum, and the SAT prep courses. (Natalia)



The second reason for the inaccurate reflection of the SAT/ACT's on one's learning aptitude is that many URM student participants have low or unmatched SAT scores to their GPA and AP test scores. Such phenomenon aligns with the literature that has indicated the limiting predictive power of the SAT and other standardized tests on students' aptitude and college success (Atkinson & Geiser, 2009; Kobrin et al., 2008; Rosner, 2011). When asked to explain the reason behind low standardized test scores, the URM student participants indicated that the test scores only reflected whether a student knew the strategies or techniques specifically needed to perform well in one test instead of the ability to learn. For example, Chris—a Latinx first-generation college student at UC San Diego—obtained a 4.0 high school GPA but only had a score of 990 out of 1600 on his SAT test, as he did not have time and resources to prepare for the test:

But during my whole school experience, at least from K to 12, I've always been getting decent grades. My high school GPA is 4.0, but I did like barely minimum in my SAT. It was 990 [out of 1600], so I don't think it reflects on learning aptitude I think it just reflects on whether you can you know how to take a test and use strategies to take the test. (Chris)

In another example, Maria—a freshman student at UC Irvine who identified herself as a low-income Hispanic student—took advanced courses in both Math and English at her school and earned full score for her AP English Language & Composition test. However, she was not able to even complete the SAT test questions without preparation for the specific test:

I think that the SAT more test, students' ability to understand the exam, and to take tests rather than like their ability to learn new subjects and how successful they will be in college, because for me, personally, I felt like I was very confident in math. And I was taking like a high-level math. But for some of the questions of the SATs, I didn't get to do them because how it was structured. And so, I feel like it tested more of like your knowledge of the test, rather than like your actual level of knowledge. And also with English, I was able to pass the AP English exam. My language one [AP English Language & Composition] was five and my literature [AP English Literature &

Composition] score was three. But at the same time, I wasn't able to get through the SAT reading portion fully. Because of the how many questions like we're for each reading portion, and like my ability to like just to read through it fast and get through the questions. So, it's like it's more about testing your like, ability to read fast or understand test questions rather than your actual learning aptitude. (Maria)

Both Chris' and Maria's experiences imply that standardized test scores have inaccurately reflected students' learning aptitude, especially when there is a lack of resources, time, or tutoring to prepare for the specific tests. Although the literature on the SAT and ACT has pointed out the intrinsically-racist nature of the tests—the test questions and content align with the background, culture, and living experiences of White students than non-White students. None of the URM student participants explicitly mentioned the intrinsic racism of the SAT, which led to lower average scores than White students (Rosner, 2011; Soares, 2011; 2012).

Still, two findings from the URM student participants of this study revealed the existence of the SAT's intrinsic racism: (a) URM students—like Chris and Maria—had low and unmatched-to-their-learning outcomes and aptitude represented by their high school GPA and AP tests and (b) URM students—like Camila and Maria—described that there were uncovered and unexperienced materials and knowledge in their high school or public education being tested on the SAT.

One participant, Juliana—a low-income Latinx student at UC Santa Cruz—recognized the White privilege from the standardized tests requirement of four-year university admissions policies:

I'd definitely say that the policy [that requires standardized tests] benefits majority of the white [students] just because they, most of them, I'd say, have more access to just overall everything. Especially, I also say, especially students who are more well off and who can afford the resources they need and want. (Juliana)

Juliana explicitly addressed the overall unequal access to all kinds of resources between White and non-White students, including both elite and working class. In this case of standardized tests preparation, students from higher socioeconomic status could afford and access the resources needed to achieve the necessary scores for selective, four-year college application. Thus, a good SAT/ACT score may only reflect whether a student had access to the test preparation resources and the spare time to study for it rather than accurately reflect URM students' learning aptitude due to resource, financial, and time barriers. The next section elaborates on the disproportionate financial barriers of standardized tests preparation and test-taking experienced by URM students.

### ***The Standardized Testing Industrial Complex***

Holding that the SAT is intrinsically racist, the test-taking demands that URM students prepare more than White students. While none of the URM student participants mentioned the intrinsic racism of the SAT, 10 (71.42%) of the URM student participants—such as Camila, Chris, and Juliana—pointed out the necessity of test preparation resources, such as purchasing workbooks, private tutoring, time, and energy to successfully score on the SAT or ACT. The students discussed how lack of—or inaccessibility of these resources—added barriers to URM students because of the commercialization of standardized tests and the testing industrial complex created by the SAT and ACT.

Lucas—a Latinx low-income first-generation college student at UC Santa Cruz—analyzed how the previous UC admissions policy requiring standardized test scores harmed URM students due to the expensive test preparation:

A lot of the time people can't afford the expensive prep courses that go into getting ready for the SAT. You can do well in school and still not do well on the SAT because the

school is like a cumulative for your exams and like everything you've learned so far, right? So, I think the previous policy [that requires standardized tests] benefits obviously people that have the money to afford the courses, because it puts them at like a higher standard in the eyes of colleges. They've done well on it. But it also affects I think it does hurt minorities and like I think it hurts more people than it benefits because most people can't afford the expensive SAT courses. (Lucas)

Lucas' perspective spoke to the experience of low-income URM students and elaborated how commercialization of the SAT added financial barriers to low-income students, which aligned with Douglass (2020) and Soares's (2011) studies. However, whether they were provided standardized tests preparation resources—such as practice tests, textbooks, workshops, and tutoring—depended on each individual high school or the students' income and class.

Most of the student participants, who attended either public or charter high schools in California, indicated limited access to the standardized test preparation resources at their schools. Two participants studied on their own from free online resources—such as Khan Academy—which were not helpful from the participants' experiences; one other participant accessed resources through a highly selective community college-bound program. When Chris (Latinx, first-generation, UC San Diego) analyzed how the SAT could add barriers to his or other URM students' college application process, he reflected on the lack of test practice materials and workshops at his public high school:

Um, I think one of the barriers is that we just didn't get practice or there wasn't any SAT practices at school. The most I would do is just a handout a packet that was optional to do. And that was it. So no, literally just there was a packet. Do if you want, or don't if you don't. And that was it. There was no preparation for the SAT. So I think that's one of the resources that we lack, SAT preparation, or maybe SAT workshop. (Chris)

Similarly, Juliana (Latinx, low-income, UC Santa Cruz) described the small charter school she attended with a majority of Hispanic students who had limited resources for test preparation, but she was not sure if the limited resources were a long-term inaccessibility or a cut

due to the four-year universities admissions policy reforms regarding the standardized tests requirement:

Because of the high school I went to was a really small, high school. I did go to a really dominant, like Hispanic school. Maybe because it became optional . . . so it's not like we were given tutors, or the resources we needed. (Juliana)

Based on their personal experiences and observations of students with high standardized scores, the URM student participants reflected that the financial capacity to pay for tutoring and learning materials—specifically for test preparation—is crucial to successful outcomes of the test. However, nine out of the 14 URM student participants were low-income and received Pell Grants, and because Californian public or charter schools provided limited test preparation resources, they faced challenges paying for test preparation resources. Further, there were limited test fee waivers; while one can take the SAT/ACT multiple times to achieve higher scores, paying to take additional tests also added financial barriers to many URM students. Maria's description of resource and financial barriers demonstrated this perpetual reality:

I think it could add barriers because minority students might not have the resources or the funds to like access, like tutoring or like study courses for the test. And I believe there's also options to take the SAT outside of what your school provides like to take it multiple times. So you can get a higher score, but you would have to like pay for it. (Maria)

Natalia (Latinx, first-generation, UC Riverside) did not identify herself as low-income. Still, she advocated for herself and other underrepresented minorities students that did not have money or resources to access additional learning materials for standardized tests. As such, inaccessibility to test preparation materials would result in a low score. Natalia chose not to take the SAT or ACT:

I feel like it would create barriers because a lot of underrepresented minorities like myself, who don't have the money or the resources to get those like study guides or

workbooks. So, it would kind of affect our scores, it would kind of lower our scores, because we don't have the same access, as other people do. (Natalia)

In conclusion, the limited access to tests and test preparation resources of many URM students—combined with the intrinsic racism of the SAT—led to URM students' lower standardized test scores than the average ones of four-year universities' freshmen admissions. The URM student participants experienced barriers related to test preparation and test-taking which reveals a testing industrial complex that was created by selective, four-year universities' admissions policies with the standardized test requirements. As suggested by Del Carmen Unda and Lizárraga-Dueñas (2021), the testing industrial complex disproportionately monetized for-profit from URM students and low-income students in the public education system. This finding also aligned with the literature that UC's standardized tests requirement has limited the impact of ELC Policy and comprehensive review process and hindered UC's improvement of freshman admissions diversity (Atkinson & Pelfrey, 2004; Bleemer, 2021; Douglass, 2020).

### **Countering Internalized Oppression of the Legitimization of the Standardized Tests Requirement**

#### ***False Perception of the SAT as the Most Important Determinant***

From the participants' descriptions, the researcher found that many participants perceived the SAT and ACT as almost the only—or the most important—determinant of receiving admittance into a four-year university requiring the test score, such as UCs. Although almost all the URM student participants considered that the standardized test did not reflect accurately their learning aptitude or predict their college success, most of them seemed to internalize the oppression of the legitimization of the standardized tests requirement of four-year higher education admission policies.

For example, Paz—a Latinx first-generation college student who attended California State University, Long Beach—described his feelings of stress and vulnerability of the standardized tests:

Because you know, this big test coming up, people stress, they feel thin, and they feel terrible because that that test can either make them or break them. (Paz)

Paz’s perception revealed the phenomenon that the SAT and ACT had been overly weighted in the URM students’ mind among the 13 factors of comprehensive review of UC’s undergraduate admissions (University of California Office of the President, 2019). In another example, Isaac (Mexican American, low-income, first-generation, UC Riverside) described that his mental state would have been negatively affected by the amount of stress through taking the test:

And I know for sure, if I were to take would have taken the SAT, I would have been like on a high amount of stress and my mind would probably be cloudy too. (Isaac)

Interestingly, 10 out of the 14 (71.43%) URM student participants expressed stress of preparing, taking, or achieving good scores for the SAT or ACT, three of whom described standardized tests as intimidating. Jordan, a Black student who was studying at UC Irvine—a highly selective UC campus—perceived taking the SAT as “an intimidation thing” because he associated the taking a test or the test score with college readiness. In his perception, or the presumed perception of college admissions, the SAT was significantly important; it represented students’ college readiness in the comprehensive review process of higher education admissions and determined college acceptance:

Because there’s people that are just not good at taking tests. Like, it doesn’t mean that they’re not like, ready for college. And especially when it’s like, such an important test that it can literally determine whether or not you get into a certain college, it feels like more of an intimidation thing than actually being ready for college. (Jordan)

These examples demonstrate the internalized oppression experienced by the URM students. According to David (2013), years of subjugation for historically and contemporarily oppressed groups may generate a belief among the individuals in these groups about their inferiority, which is further internalized over the years. These negative feelings and perceptions of URM students reflected their internalized oppression of the legitimization of admissions policies that required standardized tests. Internally, they believed the decades-long requirement of standardized tests was legitimate and, in front of such admissions policy, they felt highly stressed and/or intimidated to take the SAT and ACT and pursue four-year college education.

#### ***Low Self-efficacy and Demotivation of Attending Four-Year Higher Education***

According to the literature, the internalized, or automatic negative cognitions about their groups would also harm group members' self-esteem and various forms of mental health challenges. In this study, 11 out of the 14 URM student participants revealed their experiences with imposter syndrome and/or low self-efficacy of attending four-year colleges and succeeding in higher education. From their description, the loss of efficacy or imposter syndrome was attributed to receiving low standardized test scores; for some, it was simply just the idea of not being able to do well on the tests that caused this stress. For example, Juliana (Latinx, low-income, UC Santa Cruz) explained that UC's previous admissions policy with the standardized tests requirement negatively influenced students' self-esteem and confidence and caused imposter syndrome among URM students due to low standardized test scores:

I think the barrier would definitely be just not feeling like they [URM students] are good enough for UC or are good enough to apply to a good school because of their tests scores, so that can really influence students' self-esteem or confidence level. (Juliana)



Additionally, Chris (Latinx, first-generation, UC San Diego) recounted how teachers delivered discouraging messages to students with low standardized tests scores when they emphasized the importance of getting high standardized tests and associated it with the college applications. Such messages reinforced the internalized oppression experienced by the URM students and lowered their self-efficacy on attending four-year higher education:

And it's kind of . . . it's very discouraging for students when they, when teachers, start like putting a lot of pressure on the SAT and especially for the kids who didn't score low and I feel like it just discourages a student, and it makes them [URM students] think that they're not good for college when they really are. (Chris)

Similarly, Erik—a Latinx low-income first-generation college student who was attending UC Irvine (a highly selective UC campus)—talked about how the handouts with minimum SAT requirements provided by the teachers would discourage students from applying to selective, four-year universities:

I've seen in previous years, and even my teachers had like old handouts like there's a minimum you have to score in order to even apply to the school. And they discourage you from applying for it if you don't have that score. (Erik)

From the URM student participants' descriptions, I found that their negative cognitive attitudes towards their racial and class identities not only led to imposter syndrome and/or low self-efficacy, but also self-deprecating behaviors. The data indicate that a low-test score or the thought of getting a low score could also demotivate URM students from applying for a four-year university that required standardized test scores. Instead, eight of the 14 (or 57.12%) URM participants decided to apply for community colleges instead of trying for four-year universities when they had or thought of getting low standardized scores before UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement. For example, Chris (Latinx, first-generation, UC San Diego), elaborated the thinking process of URM students when they did not have high standardized test

scores to apply for and enter four-year higher education, a mentality that demotivated these students to even try or submit any application to any UC campus:

A lot of us didn't score very, very well. And you know, so we would get discouraged like oh, you know what, I don't think my SAT score is good enough. Why even try? Get you know, buy some things had that mentality. I know people who had that mentality so that the required SATs discourage, I feel like it did discourage people with their application. So they were like, oh, yeah, I'm not going to get into [four-year] college with this with this score. So it would be very discouraging. If the SAT was required, I would probably never apply to any UCs. (Chris)

Erik (Latinx, low-income, first-generation, UC Irvine), described that the information received from the schoolteachers before UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement included minimum standardized test scores in order to apply for a UC campus, and teachers discouraged students without a school's minimum standardized test scores from applying for the school:

I've seen in previous years, and even my teachers had like old handouts like there's a minimum you have to score in order to even apply to a school. And they discourage you from applying for it if you don't have that score. (Erik)

The experiences of Chris and Erik reveal how teachers advised on standardized test scores, statistics of standardized test scores publicized by four-year universities, and the discourse around admissions policies with the standardized tests requirement. This could all reinforce the internalized oppression experienced by the URM students and demotivate them from applying for four-year higher education. This finding also aligned with the literature that low self-efficacy related to racial identity or caused by negative attitudes received based on racial identities demotivate students' pursuit for post-secondary education (Cook et al., 2015; Pérusse et al., 2017), because historically and contemporary oppressed groups may have a sense of inferiority and self-deprecating thoughts and behaviors (Axner, n.d.; David, 2013).

These findings imply that the standardized tests requirement as part of a university's freshman admissions policy had excluded URM students from four-year higher education system; their internalized oppression of the legitimization of the decades-long standardized tests requirement of admissions policy demotivated them from applying for four-year universities. Additionally, both teachers and statistics facilitated the internalization process of oppression of such admissions policy. Then, when UC Regents Policy 2103's reform from fall 2021 freshman admissions was implemented in May 2020, it broke the seven-decades-long systematic oppression created by the standardized tests requirement and deconstructed the internalized oppression experienced by the URM students.

After the UC admissions policy reform, URM students were relieved of their stress surrounding standardized tests score. The internalized oppression would induce self-deprecating thoughts and behaviors, such as imposter syndrome, low self-efficacy, demotivation, and/or decision of not applying for four-year higher education; contrarily, deconstruction of the internalized oppression would also transform the levels of self-efficacy and motivation. The next section presents data explaining how UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement has led to elevated self-efficacy, alleviated imposter syndrome, and motivated URM students to take action of applying and attending UC universities, including the highly selective campuses.

### ***Deconstructed Internalized Oppression by the Policy Reform***

The internalized oppression broke when the systematic oppression was deconstructed by UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement. When asked the changes of college planning and application process after UC's policy reform and its benefits and harms, 12 out of 14 (85.71%) student participants mentioned their increased self-efficacy and motivation for

attending four-year universities, including highly selective ones. The standardized tests requirement was a construct of four-year higher education admissions' oppression towards URM and low-income students. The policy reform deconstructed part of the oppressive admissions system. Thus, the sense of inferiority and self-deprecating thoughts and behaviors among URM students—especially the low-income students—reduced.

Chris (Latinx, first-generation, UC San Diego) considered the major benefit of UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement to be confidence in applying for selective, four-year universities. The policy reform transformed Chris' imposter syndrome and demotivation caused by the internalized oppression of previous standardized tests requirement and boosted his confidence and positive thought. Under the policy reform, Chris applied, got accepted, and enrolled in UC San Diego, a highly selective UC campus (University of California Office of the President, 2020):

I believe the benefit was just confidence. I think the main aspect is confidence and not being afraid to apply to UC because of a score that you didn't do well on. I mean, my confidence, it would be more of the type of like, Oh, I'm not good enough for this. So I'm not gonna even try. But knowing about that policy is like, you know what, I think I have a chance I'm gonna go and do it. So I think, I feel like that's the reason I'm here today in UC San Diego, because I decided to apply with more confidence, for sure. So I believe that this policy provides more confidence for students, rather than a harm. (Chris)

Isaac (Mexican American, low-income, first-generation, UC Riverside) was another example of the deconstructed internalized oppression. The policy reform removed the high levels of stress related to standardized test-taking and increased his motivation in applying to four-year universities:

Especially because knowing that or when they told me that I wouldn't need to take the SAT, I guess it really motivated me like, okay, might as well do four years then. (Isaac)

Deconstructed internalized oppression after UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement helped eliminate fear and stress related to preparing, taking, and achieving good scores for standardized tests. The URM students' positive cognitive attitudes towards their own social groups and their increased self-efficacy also helped remove negative mental health outcomes. Specifically, 11 out of 14 (78.57%) of the URM student participants reflected on reduced levels of fear and stress in their college planning and application process after UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement was implemented.

For example, Erik (Latinx, low-income, first-generation, UC Irvine) pointed out that the previous admissions policy with the standardized tests requirement caused a mental health barrier for URM students and UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement took away fear and imposter syndrome of attending selective, four-year universities:

It takes away that mental health barrier of having to stress about one test that determines your future. And it [the policy reform] just allowed so many students to aim higher and aim for those reach schools. So, I think it took away that fear of not being able to get into higher or more prestigious schools. (Erik)

Alexis—a Latinx low-income first-generation college student at UCLA (the most selective UC campus) explained the shift about motivation of applying to selective, four-year universities: When students found out UC's previous admissions policy with the standardized tests requirement, they were stressed about submitting test scores and they were demotivated by UC admissions policy. After the policy reform, URM students experienced reduced stress and were allowed to apply without submitting their standardized tests score; the policy reform increased their motivation of applying to selective, four-year universities:

Because what we're finding about the UC is that they required the student test scores, and that kind of unmotivates them, but once they took out the pressure of submitting scores. They [URM students] are more motivated to like apply and just see if they are lucky

enough, so it allows students without scores to apply. And there is like, motivation for them to apply for college to I see. (Alexis)

### ***URM Students' Changed Decisions to Pursue Selective, Four-Year Higher Education***

Beyond elevated self-efficacy of attending selective, four-year universities, among 12 (85.71%) of the URM student participants, eight out of 14 (57.14%) changed their college application plans as the policy reform countered the internalized oppression of the legitimacy of the standardized tests requirement. This finding also aligned with the literature that positive cognitive attitudes toward oneself, and their social group, led to related positive behaviors (Axner, n.d.; David, 2013). UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement helped the URM students understand that without a test score or a high-test score, they were still eligible to apply for a UC university and would not be put at a disadvantage. Thus, they became motivated and decided to apply to UC and other selective, four-year universities; before learning about the policy reform, they intended to only apply to community colleges or not-selective, four-year universities.

For example, Natalia (Latinx, first-generation, UC Riverside) did not have access to test preparation resources, so she only thought about just applying for community colleges because she did not take the SAT. However, after finding out about UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement in her senior year, she changed her decision, applied to UCs, and enrolled in UC Riverside in fall 2022:

Oh, well, at first beginning my junior year, I was thinking about just applying to community colleges. I still hadn't heard that the SATs weren't required. But during the first day of my senior year when I found out through my friend, she told me Hey, SATs aren't required anymore. You can apply to UCs now. I started doing my own research and I figured out that yeah, SATs aren't required. So I got the courage to apply to UC. (Natalia)

Maria—a Latinx low-income student at UC Irvine—was another example of a URM student’s changing application decision with more courage and self-efficacy. The statistics about average test scores of the selective, four-year universities discouraged her from trying for these schools, but UC’s elimination of the standardized tests requirement provided her with opportunities and confidence to apply for selective, four-year universities, even though her test score did not fall into the range of the scores of previously admitted students:

I was actually really relieved about planning. I mean, going to college because I was worried that my scores weren’t high enough for me to get in because I would like Google average test ranges for the SAT that get you admitted, and I wasn’t in those ranges. So I was like, Okay, well, maybe I should just consider like going to community college first and then I’ll try afterwards so I don’t have to rely on like, those kinds of test scores to get in. But then, after they suspended it, I feel more relieved because I felt that my abilities in other areas outside of the SAT were pretty strong so I had a better chance of getting into college. (Maria)

Only based on their observations, six out of 14 (42.85%) of the URM student participants indicated that many of their peers also decided to and did apply to four-year universities after learning about UC’s elimination of the standardized tests requirement. For example, Juliana (Latinx, low-income, UC Santa Cruz) went to a charter school with a majority of Hispanic students. She shared that many of her classmates felt a sense of relief from not taking standardized tests after the policy reform and applied to four-year universities:

But it also felt, I think, a lot of my classmates because I did go to a really dominantly Hispanic school. So I think for a lot of us, it was like, we’re going to be okay, we don’t have to worry about just another test. And, a lot of us got to apply to [four-year] universities. (Juliana)

Erik (Latinx, low-income, first-generation, UC Irvine) also went to a public high school with predominantly Hispanic students. Like Juliana, Erik described a sense of relief in the air after the policy reform. Further, he said that many of the students there applied for four-year

universities “for the first time,” which meant that in previous years before the policy reform, students with similar background did not apply for four-year universities:

You know, so just figuring out that we didn’t have to take that test, and we have the possibilities of attending four-year universities without that number hanging around our heads. It just it was just like a sense of relief and, and a sense of excitement in the air. So I know, my school, a lot of students like actually applied to a four-year university for the first time. (Erik)

This finding indicates that UC’s elimination of the standardized tests requirement has not only deconstructed the internalized oppression of individual URM students but has also fostered a positive four-year college-application culture—if not college-going culture—and consequent decisions and actions at schools with high percentage of URM students. This finding also explains the increased freshmen applications of URM students to all UC campuses for fall 2021 and fall 2022.

### ***Disproportionate Policy Effectiveness on Alleviating Internalized Oppression***

It is worth noticing that there were four URM student participants who identified the feelings of applying and getting into a selective, four-year university after UC’s elimination of the standardized tests requirement as hope and optimism: Rather than believing in themselves that they were able to enter selective, four-year universities, these URM students felt more hopeful and optimistic about getting into a selective university. Such phenomenon indicates the disproportionate level of alleviation of internalized oppression of UC’s standardized tests requirement experienced by different groups of URM students. Two of them are Erik and Alexis—both of whom are Latinx, low-income, and first-generation college students. Both students mentioned increased levels of confidence and hope for applying and attending to a selective, four-year university. However, the other two participants, Jordan and Laila—who



identify themselves as Black, non-low-income, and non-first-generation college students—did not use “confident” to describe their attitudes towards getting into selective, four-year universities.

Jordan (Black, UC Irvine), who used to believe that the standardized test score could literally determine college admissions decisions, reflected a reduced level of fear and sense of relief during his college application process after he knew the policy reform. Still, he used “hopeful” to describe his feelings about getting into a selective, four-year university:

It made the application process easier. And like, just easier overall, and less intimidating, because it’s like, if I don’t have to take this test that I’m probably not even going to do good at. And the only thing that colleges are going to look at are my grades and my extracurriculars, then it’s like, it makes me more hopeful that I’ll get into the school that I want to get into. (Jordan)

Another example is Laila—a Black student at UC Davis (a very-selective UC campus)—who self-disclosed that she was diagnosed with bipolar disorder at the beginning of her senior year due to long-term distant learning, stress of transferring back to in-person learning, and stress of college applications. When asked if she felt more confident or less confident in applying to and attending a selective, four-year university after knowing UC’s elimination of the standardized tests requirement, she determinately denied. The policy reform only reduced stress related to standardized tests, but not about the entire college application process:

Absolutely not. Very stressful, very nerve racking. I wanted to know, where when am I getting in? Where am I going to college? What’s my paper gonna be like it, I feel like it’s the same amount of prep that it would have been. I feel like the test itself and taking it would have caused more stress. But I don’t think it would have made application process more stressful, because I feel like after, after I’ve already taken the test, I know my score, have my best score. I know if I’ve done the best that I can do, then the best part is the stress from the test, I feel like is kind of subsided, but then from the stress from applying, wanting to wanting to go somewhere where I’m going to be happy. (Laila)

She expressed anxiety and uncertainty about her admissions results and would only claim that the policy reform brought hope and optimism about getting into a selective, four-year university. It is worth noticing that both Laila and Jordan identified as Black, but neither identified as low-income nor first-generation college students. Although their descriptions indicate self-deprecating thoughts and behaviors prior to the policy reform that are similar to Latinx student participants, the policy reform did not seem to increase much of their self-efficacy and lower their stress levels compared with those of Latinx student participants. Thus, the low-self efficacy of Black students could be attributed more to the negative belief about their racial identities as individuals from historically oppressed groups in society and the higher education system and less to that of their class:

I probably would have ended up going with Cal State, which I mean, again, it's not a bad thing or bad colleges, I'm happy to be wherever I am to get medications. But definitely, since the policy reform, I really felt. . . . I don't think I would say confident, I would say more optimistic, I guess. It was like a hopeful thing, I might have a chance kind of thing. (Laila)

In conclusion, UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement deconstructed the internalized oppression of decades-long legitimization of the standardized tests requirement and increased URM students' self-efficacy, motivational level, and/or optimism in applying and accessing selective, four-year higher education. However, the internalized oppression of legitimization of the standardized tests requirement was mostly related to students' class or income level. Thus, although the policy reform had some positive influence on the level of self-efficacy and motivation of URM students, the influence was disproportionate on subsets of the URM students. Critically speaking, this policy reform could barely break the long-term internalized oppression of higher education system experienced by the URM students who were

also first-generation college students. The intersectional identities and multi-layered oppression in higher education admissions are further discussed in the next theme.

### **Intersectionality of Race, Income, First-Generation College Students Status, and Pandemic Impacts**

Delgado and Stefancic (2017) emphasized that the individual perspectives of the underrepresented minority groups not only provide previously untold counter-narratives, but also help to understand and not oversimplify the predicament of individuals with intersectional identities. The critical race theory tenet of intersectionality examines various forms of oppression and how the collusion of those forms has created unique experiences of the intersectional individuals (Crenshaw, 1995). This theme of intersectionality analyzed the perspectives of low-income, first-generation, URM college students in their college planning and application process and the barriers experienced in the process.

The data analysis of this research indicates that the unique contexts of COVID-19 pandemic and distance learning for a year to a year and half exacerbated the negative effects of the overlapped oppression experienced by low-income, first-generation, URM college students. Table 11 briefly presents the multi-layered oppression experienced by URM students and those with intersectional identities based on class and parents' education and within the contexts of the COVID-19 pandemic and distance learning:

**Table 11***URM Students With Intersectional Identities' Barriers for Succeeding in Four-Year Higher Education and the Roles of UC's Elimination of the Standardized Tests Requirement*

Student Identities	Barriers for Succeeding in Four-Year Higher Education	Policy Effects
URM Students	More time, energy, and learning needed than white students to combat intrinsic racism of the SAT/ACT; Internalized oppression of legitimization of standardized tests; Internalized oppression of long-term systematic oppression based on race in higher education, which perpetuates after enrolling in four-year higher education.	Removes barriers caused by intrinsic racism of the SAT/ACT; Breaks internalized oppression of legitimization of standardized tests.
First-Generation College Students	Lack of guidance and support from family members; Internalized oppression due to generations-long exclusion and marginalization from U.S. higher education system; Ignorance, indifference, and demotivation from applying for selective, four-year higher education; Isolation, demotivation, and lack of support after enrollment to four-year higher education.	Increases opportunities of application, breaks internalized oppression due to parents' education background and brings hopes.
COVID-19 Pandemic	Communication delay and inaccessibility to counselors and teachers; Demotivation and mental health issues due to long-term quarantine and isolation; Difficulty with adapting and transiting between distance learning and in-person learning.	n/a

***Perspectives of Low-Income Students***

Nine out of 14 (64.29%) URM student participants were low-income students, each of whom reflected on the financial barriers of college application and enrollment. Facing the high costs of higher education, these students had internalized the oppression of higher class or income and showed fear and stress regarding paying for four-year higher education, which further discouraged these students from applying to four-year higher education. Thus, resources and guidance for financial aid, grants, and scholarship applications became a requirement for the low-income students in applying for higher education institutions, especially selective, four-year universities.

When asked about barriers experienced during her college planning and application process, Juliana (Latinx, low-income, UC Santa Cruz) first revealed her limited school choices because of the expensive application fees, followed by her fear and stress about the financial costs and affordability of UCs. Although UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement removed the financial barriers related to test preparation and increased her self-efficacy—which further led her to apply to and attend UC Santa Cruz—Juliana continued to experience systematic oppression of higher education on low-income students and internalized oppression of high costs of four-year college application and tuition:

My application experience was overall really hard. Just because I . . . I pretty much paid everything. And with how expensive the applications are, it's not like I can apply to all the schools I wanted to, or really have like a broad range of, you know, what I wanted to do. I was also kind of afraid that my parents couldn't have been able to pay for any of my tuition. So that was another thing that I felt that was another thing that also kept me stressed about the UCs. Because I didn't know if we were we would be able to afford the tuition and stuff like that. (Juliana)

Even after successfully applying for financial aid and grants, these students still had limited choices after receiving admission results. From their perspectives, they decided which schools to attend by comparing the financial aid, grants, and scholarships, instead of the prestige and major programs of the schools. In this, the financial capacity and affordability of higher education limited choices and opportunities of low-income URM students to access highly selective, four-year universities.

In another example, Diego (Latinx, low-income first-generation, at UC Riverside) shared that UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement alleviated the financial barriers related to accessing to test preparation resources:

I think it benefited me, obviously, because I can't really afford a tutor. So since removing it, I didn't have to bomb the entire test. And like, get a really bad application. So it just

like benefited me in like, just like not exist. So it doesn't make me look that weak academically. (Diego)

Still, when describing other barriers of the college application process, Diego recalled his concerns about the costs of college and whether he or his family could afford daily expenses and the tuition not covered by the financial aid package. The low-income status limited his college application decision and school choices: Instead of comparing strengths of academic programs or school prestige, Diego compared grants and scholarships offered by each university that accepted him and decided to attend UC Riverside. For Diego, the school provided additional financial support beyond Cal Grant or Pell Grant:

Um, some other barriers I had to face is picking my college wisely, because I know that I couldn't afford some of them or some things like dorming, or meal plans I couldn't afford so I had to understand how much the college will cost and how much my Financial Aid cover? Whichever one. This one was the cheapest, but like, there was other colleges that would have cost, like 7,000 dollars a year that I couldn't do. I just like, pick the cheapest one and went with it. It was one in Los Angeles. I literally can't remember, there was like CSU LA or something like that. Um, that one was cost 7,000. I didn't really check the other ones because I was like, so focused on going to the one in LA and then that's when I realized that it was gonna cost like, 7,000 a year. And for the cost of UCR, we like estimated it was gonna be around 1,000. I had the UCR grant. And then like a Cal Grant that really like supported us. (Diego)

Diego exemplified the college planning and application barriers experienced specifically by low-income students; the oppression of higher education based on class or income level persisted. For low-income students, it was hard to say if UC Regents Policy 2103's reform positively impacted them, as it only removed a small portion of financial barrier related to standardized tests for students who applied to selective, four-year universities—especially the highly selective ones.

Further, financial barriers or concerns continued to influence low-income students during college. However, when asked about confidence level of completing college, Diego expressed concerns about future financial aid application, resources, and support to succeed in college:

Now, since I'm no longer attending high school, I feel like I'm going to struggle when like applying for FAFSA [Federal Student Aid] and everything because I feel like I have lost the support I got, but I just have to reach out to the people here now, which is a change. (Diego)

His description reveals the continued financial barrier and lack of support for financial and other aspects in higher education of a low-income, first-generation college URM student. The next section discusses the experiences of first-generation college students or those who are both low-income and first-generation college students, like Diego after UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement.

### ***Perspectives of First-Generation College Students***

Ten out of 14 URM student participants were first-generation college students, defined by UC as "neither parent has a four-year college degree" (University of California Information Center, 2022a). Each participant revealed a lack of information and guidance of college planning and application from their parents, because their parents did not experience college applications or higher education in their lifetime. Although UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement removed some stress and fear related to standardized tests, the first-generation college student applicants still experienced these negative emotions due to the lack of family support.

Such findings indicate that there has been another form of oppression experienced by first-generation college students throughout their college planning and application process. Aligned with the literature, first-generation college students have faced more stress with college

applications if they lacked family support and felt uncertain and incapable of navigating the entire application process toward the four-year higher education that their parents never attained.

Erik was proudly the first in his extended family who ever attended college, especially a highly selective, four-year university: UC Irvine. However, as a Latinx low-income, first-generation college student, Erik described multiple barriers, stress, and lack of support from his parents. They would not support the student with any funds for higher education, and even showed resistance to providing citizenship and tax documents needed for financial aid application:

Once I started applying to colleges, it was a little stressful because I did not have the full support of my parents. They never gone through this. Because my parents are strict. Like I said, they, they were not supportive. So I couldn't really bring my parents tax returns to the school to get help from my teachers with that. . . . I think they were mostly scared. Like I went into this knowing that my parents were not going to support me financially, they were not going to support me in any way. And I knew it was because it was new, it was something that they're scared of. But once I started, like, I would sit down with them, and I would show him the application, and they would freak out. They're like, don't ask me for money. And I'm like, I'm not asking you for money, I just want you to show you. And they didn't know, financial aid covers, basically most of it. (Erik)

Camila, a low-income first-generation college student and English language learner at UC Riverside, identified being a first-generation college student as the largest barrier in her college planning and application process. However, unlike Erik, Camila experienced language barriers within her household—she had to translate and explain to her parents to prepare the required documents for college application. This unique experience could only occur to students with the intersectional identities of low-income, first-generation college student, immigrant, non-native speaker:

The largest barrier I faced during college planning and my application process was being first-gen. So I had no one to ask, Oh, how do I fill this out? Or, Oh, where do I put this? Or where do I put that? Mostly, and in terms of like financial aid, I had to explain to my



parents, ‘Oh, it says I need this document’. But then there are certain words that I can’t translate. So it would be difficult to really get through them with like, oh, I need this and this and this. (Camila)

Both Erik’s and Camila’s experiences reveal students with intersectional identities of race, income, first-generation, and/or language learner have had unique multi-layered barriers in their college application process. Low-income, first-generation URM students—like Erik and Camila—lacked family support, family experiential knowledge, and/or faced huge family resistance in their paths of pursuing four-year higher education. The experiences of parents as immigrants and individuals who have never attended colleges in the U.S. hold fear, stress, and ignorance about the system, because their socioeconomic, historic, and cultural backgrounds do not build up a knowledge system that prepare them for the U.S. higher education.

Furthermore, these parents and family members have experienced generations-long isolation or marginalization from the higher education system or are immigrants whose first language is not English. They themselves were excluded from the U.S. higher education system, so they had limited knowledge about how the admissions process worked and became reluctant to help their children to navigate the path that they had never walked. Thus, students coming from such family background have faced additional and unique barriers than those whose parents attended and completed higher education: lack of information and family support, lack of trust in the higher education system, and parents’ fear and discouragement about their kids applying for four-year universities.

### ***Perspectives Towards the COVID-19 Pandemic and Distance Learning***

The COVID-19 pandemic and distance learning for a year and half created difficulties during the transition and adaptation of different learning platforms and environments. Some

students reflected that they were concerned about distant learning and how it had caused uncertainty and risks of not adapting or learning well remotely. Alexis—a Latinx low-income, first-generation college student at UCLA (the most selective UC campus)—decided to take fewer AP courses and lower the challenging level of the coursework due to distance learning:

When I was a sophomore, when it happened, I was taking three AP classes. But when it came down to junior year, like they say it's like the hardest year and they look into that. I have decided to only take two AP classes because I was scared that I would do bad during the Zoom. Yeah, I mean, didn't really affect it in the end, but I guess just the motivation, because of the distant learning on Zoom. (Alexis)

Laila, a Black student at UC Davis, shared that transiting back to in-person learning during senior year was another challenge: While senior year's courses were the most advanced ones during high school, students still needed to apply for college. Further, she was diagnosed with bipolar disorder at the beginning of the senior year when the school reopened after the COVID-19 pandemic, which also negatively influenced her academic performance and college application process:

The AP Calculus thing was, yeah, because it was it was too hard of a class, and I couldn't pick up after everything [distant learning]. I made the application process kind of a priority. And AP Calculus was also a priority. It's definitely harder than online school. But I feel like I had a somewhat unique schedule, my seniors, and I had times where it was stressful for school. But I think the application process was probably more stressful than my academic year. The application process was probably the most, one of the most stressful parts. (Laila)

Besides, such learning or schooling format could negatively influence students' emotional wellbeing and motivation level, and it could also be the reason why some students like Laila had great challenges transiting back to in-person learning. These participants used the terms “dull” and “boring” to describe their school experiences. Chris (Latinx, first-generation, UC San Diego) described himself as becoming “lazy” and “less productive” in academic

performance and lost interest and motivation when he went back to in-person learning for his senior year:

Yeah, I think remote learning demotivate a lot of us, including me. Grades started slipping. I became more lazy, less productive, all of that. And I was just so tired of school. That my senior year I wasn't even that excited. I was excited about being in person. But that was about it. I wasn't excited about school anymore. (Chris)

Similarly, Paz (Latinx, first-generation, CSU Long Beach) described that online learning had loopholes for students to find correct answers and get good grades, but it challenged students to keep motivated and actually learn through online schooling:

That one was definitely like a struggle. I'm just like, I did pass that year. I did my work, but I wasn't trying like I just got answers from other people and test I just Googled like, it was an easy A but it was it was boring. It made things like dull. The motivation level is low because of this online learning. (Paz)

Surprisingly, Paz's experience was not a singular case. Two other URM student participants pointed out that distant learning actually became easier than in-person in terms of achieving good grades or GPA. Isaac (Latinx, low-income, first-generation, UC Riverside) reflected on the negative mental health impact of the distant learning and the lowest point in life during the COVID-19 pandemic, despite his good GPA:

I would say that was probably like, my lowest point in life, I would say, because since I was isolated in my room pretty much for a whole year. It had me self reflect a lot of the choices I did in high school. And looking back at it, I guess, it was a time where I reflected about myself, and as I told myself, that it made me more serious about what I want to do in the future, ever since that happened. Surprisingly, my GPA was actually pretty good. But it was mainly just the isolation and just my mental health that was affected by it. (Isaac)

Another barrier of college planning and application during the COVID-19 pandemic was the limited access to school counselors and teachers. Six (42.86%) of the URM student participants experienced this barrier. Due to large student-counselor ratios of the schools that

these participants studied, remote learning made teachers, counselors, or college-planning programs and facilities inaccessible. Maria (Latinx, low-income, UC Irvine) shared her experience of college planning during the pandemic; the school's College Planning Center was closed during her junior year, when the entire school adopted distant learning. She was unable to access the center until her senior year when the school reopened for in-person learning:

I would say only during my junior year, because on my junior year, we were completely online. So I couldn't really go to the College Planning Center during that time. But I was able to go during the beginning of senior year when school opened back up again. I think my counselor had like office hours. But I don't remember if the College Planning Center also had office hours for like zoom meetings. (Maria)

Juliana (Latinx, low-income, UC Santa Cruz) described the inconvenience of not being able to just walk to her counselor's office during distant learning and the slow communication and delayed access to her counselor through email and Zoom:

When I did start preparing [in junior year], it's additional harder, because I couldn't just like walk into my counselor's office and ask them for help. I had to email them and probably wait like a day or two for response, and then wait, like, another week just to talk to them via Zoom. (Juliana)

While some URM student participants could hardly schedule a meeting with their counselors, others had to wait for a few weeks or could never meet with their counselors. An extreme case was Camila (Latinx, low-income, first-generation, English language learner, UC Riverside): In a school with large student-counselor ratio, it was already hard to connect with the counselor. During the year of distant learning, students with limited technology access could connect to the counselor online, the counselor didn't work during the summer, and when senior year came, the counselor left the school. In Camila's experience, the counselor at her school was barely accessible during the pandemic:

Usually, the counselor would hold large meetings with the entire senior class, or junior class at the time. And she would say, Hey, guys, so next year, you're starting college applications. And if you need help, make sure to come to me. But then it was difficult to set up meetings because then students didn't have WiFi or there's too many lags within the Zoom call. And people were struggling to connect with her at all. And people decided, Oh, we can contact her during the summer. But during the summer, she set up an automated bot that would say not reading emails until next year. And next year, she left. (Camila)

Such limited access to counseling resources and personnel negatively and disproportionately influenced URM students who were low-income and/or first-generation college students, as they had limited resources and guidance from their household or could not afford any non-school private sources. Ava, a Latinx low-income, first-generation college student at UC Irvine, discussed missed opportunities and resources in her college planning process during her junior year, as she could hardly reach her college counselor through limited office hours on Zoom:

I feel like I could have been more thorough and looking for colleges, and going more in depth, if junior year, it wasn't online. And mostly because I didn't really have a person that I could always go to. I know for in person, I could go to the college person whenever I wanted. But since Zoom, they only had limited hours, so I didn't really know what to start, where to start. (Ava)

Erik (Latinx, low-income, first-generation, UC Irvine) described multiple factors in his and his family's life which were negatively influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic and added barriers and stress in the student's college planning and application process. These factors included no medical insurance, anxiety about contracting COVID-19 and potential medical costs, unemployment of his parents, family financial crisis, loss of his grandparents, arrangements for funerals, etc.:

So that was something that was really scary for them, like me going to a place that has so much germs, it's a little Yeah, and then also, I wasn't insured for a lot of the COVID pandemic. So that was also really scary of like, if I needed to get a medical, and like a

medical treatment, where I was I supposed to get that I was that was a new thing. And then also, when applying to college, you have to have like, all those immunizations, I'm like, Oh, I have to figure out the place where to get all of these. . . . And another thing was COVID really mess with my family's finances. So that was an . . . it was another thing that got my parents like kind of nervous and kind of added a barrier to applying to colleges. My dad was out of work for a good like, four months, it was yeah, it was really bad. And he's like the big provider for a household so and then also those two grandparents died. So like paying for the funeral. Funeral expenses were crazy expensive. Especially because they died during that peak. Getting, you know, arrangements was really hard and really falling on my family financially. (Erik)

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the wealth gap, leading low-income students to face even heightened financial barriers and pressure of applying and paying for four-year higher education than those before the pandemic. Meanwhile, students who attended distance learning from spring 2020 to spring 2021 experienced additional mental health challenges and demotivation due to isolation and unfamiliar learning format. The higher education equity advancement might have been reflected by UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement, as it removed financial barriers related to standardized tests preparation and taking. However, the COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted the URM students, especially those who were also low-income and/or first-generation college students in three aspects: the disparities of counseling resources among secondary schools due to inaccessibility or resignation of counselors, the delayed communication and technological challenges through distant learning, and the negative mental challenges. Thus, this specific context also made the intersectional URM students' college planning and application process more unique and worth exploring.

### ***The Support System Recognizing Funds of Knowledge***

For URM students with intersectional identities of low-income status and/or first-generation college student, this research found that a strong support system was especially important for them to navigate and access selective, four-year higher education in the context of

COVID-19 pandemic. Such support systems may involve counselors, teachers, peers, and family members who share similar identities or visions with the students.

The support not only included the actual guidance and information of college planning and application, but also involved emotional support from student applicant's peers and parents. Support from individuals who share similar identities with the students can prove more meaningful and influential in terms of student decision-making and behaviors of college application, which can be explained by the funds of knowledge theory. Several studies of funds of knowledge have found that social relationships facilitate the growth of knowledge, skills, labor, and other abilities for survival and socio-economic development (Moll et al., 2005; Moll & Greenberg, 1990; Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 1989). The influential individuals—no matter if they are teachers, counselors, peers, or families—are within the social networks of URM student applicants, and their shared identities indicate the shared experience, skills, and community knowledge. Therefore, URM students can be heavily influenced by individuals who share their identities wherein they recognize the value of four-year higher education.

For Erik, it was only through strong support from his teachers and self-advocacy that he proceeded in the applications and attended a highly selective, four-year university. When asked who was involved in supporting him to overcome the barriers, Erik pointed out that even though the counselor left, teachers who shared his identities as low-income and first-generation college students became very supportive as they understood his barriers:

So, I think I relied more on my teachers who were also first-gen. So I have like my Spanish teacher was Miss Luis. She was a first-gen and went to UCR. And then I had another teacher who was a first year from UCSB. So I was relying more on teachers who shared common traits with me, or common identities with me that understand the struggles I was going through. Yeah, ethnicity. They also came from low income. So they were really the ones who supported me throughout this entire thing. (Erik)

Meanwhile, Erik needed to advocate for himself and educate his parents to eliminate their fear and concern about the financial costs of four-year higher education in the United States:

Yeah, it was a lot of self-advocating. I think they were worried for the pockets. But once I've actually gotten in and have shown, like, they helped me move in yesterday. And they were more open to it. So, I think just educating them. And, for your research, I guess, like actually educating families on the college application season and what it actually entails is important. As they didn't know, financial aid covers, basically most of it. So just educating them is really what helped them understand. So it's not that they were like, 'we don't want you to go to college,' it's just like, 'we're really scared and don't know what this entails.' (Erik)

Juliana (Latinx, low-income, UC Santa Cruz) also described the support from her teachers and college planning course at school. Her experience also showed that a teacher who shared similar identities as a URM student could be a model and especially helpful for student to pursue selective, four-year university:

We didn't get counselor help. It was more of just a teacher who, who has been through the process and who has been a teacher for that class for all those years. And you could pretty much ask any teacher in our school. And they would, they will like, you know, definitely want to help us because they will want to see us go to college. Yeah, and I did have had a teacher who came to UC Santa Cruz for biology. So it was kind of like a helping hand because she knew how the school worked and what they were looking for. (Juliana)

Besides teachers and self-advocacy, the power of peers was underestimated by the researcher. As the URM students were marginalized from the U.S. higher education system for a long time, many of them significantly trusted the advice and ideas of their peers who had similar identities, background, or experience, such as their siblings or friends at school. Natalia (Latinx, first-generation, UC Riverside), whose counselor resigned in their senior year, relied on and trusted heavily her URM friends' suggestions. They informed her about UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement and inspired Natalia to apply for UC campuses:



My friends also helped me a lot because they encouraged me. They were the ones who encouraged me to apply. So if it wasn't for them, I wouldn't have applied to a UC system. My friends were the same year as me. So we were all applying to different colleges. But we all didn't like we all helped each other throughout some of the challenges that we. Most of them are first-generation and they're also underrepresented minorities. (Natalia)

Lucas (Latinx, low-income, first-generation, UC Santa Cruz) had two older siblings who were all first-generation college students. In addition to his teachers, Lucas' sisters helped the participant confirm the policy reform, evaluate his academic background and extracurriculars, and supported him to apply to the UCs:

So I didn't really have a plan when it came to applying, I guess, I mean, I did some research on colleges I wanted to apply to. And then I talked to my sisters specifically, since they've gone through the process before and they helped, they helped me out like a good deal with the . . . with like the essays and all of that, and like filling out the forms that I needed to apply. . . . My eldest sister, she went to the University of Arizona and she majored in Political Science and Spanish, I believe, and then my other sister who's currently still in college. She is at UC Riverside. . . . But I also had, like, a good amount of help from my school as well, like teachers and guidance counselors. My school was like pretty big on like, making sure like a majority of the students went to college. So there was a lot of help, just from there. (Lucas)

Lastly, in addition to self-advocacy and informative guidance of peers, teachers, and families, emotional support from these key stakeholders for a URM college applicant is also important for their success of accessing selective, four-year higher education. Three URM student participants shared the emotional support from their parents, even though they did not attend higher education themselves. While Lucas was an example, Isaac (Mexican American, low-income, first-generation, UC Riverside) was another example. He was highly motivated by his mom to apply for college, even though his entire family did not experience U.S. higher education:

Because my family they came from like, I guess somewhere like poverty in a way because we're I came I grew up in a Mexican American household, like, my grandma,

my aunts my, my own pool, they didn't go to college, like after high school, they begin working. And so yeah, I am saying that like my mom was like highly motivating me to like go to college and not like take the other route that you know, like our . . . what our family did. And so I guess seeing that I guess see my mom really telling me that and also looking at my family kind of made me want to do more with my life essentially. (Isaac)

It seemed that although many first-generation college students' parents did not access or were marginalized in the U.S. higher education system a few decades ago, the college-going culture and acknowledgement of the benefits of four-year higher education have spread and influenced some households of first-generation URM students.

UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement allowed many URM students with intersectional identities of low-income and/or first-generation college students without standardized tests or high scores to qualify for UC application. However, students still experienced multi-layered barriers and systematic oppression: Low-income students who faced stress and limited choices for four-year college application, especially need financial aid, scholarship, and grants application guidance, but may still give up admitted four-year universities due to financial barriers; first-generation college students who lack information and guidance for everything about college planning and application could face family's ignorance, fear, and resistance to supporting them for pursuing four-year higher education.

Therefore, the opportunities to access selective, four-year higher education had to be facilitated by a strong support system involving counselors, teachers, peers, family members, and the URM students themselves. The collaborative effort of some or all these stakeholders could significantly support URM students with intersectional identities to overcome multi-layered college planning and application barriers and internalized oppression and eventually to access selective, four-year universities in the unique context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The last

theme discusses how UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement helped build trust among URM students and explores the emergent discourse and attitudes towards selective, four-year university admissions.

### **URM Students' Increased Trust in UC's Admissions System**

#### ***Low Trust in UC's Higher Education System or its Admissions Process***

From the interviews, the researcher found an emergent issue when the participants shared their perceptions and experiences after the policy reform: 10 (71.43%) of the URM student participants did not have accurate and timely information about the policy reform, or they did not trust the policy reform of eliminating the standardized tests requirement. All the URM student participants heard about the news of UC's suspending the standardized tests requirement, but some considered it a rumor, others considered it as temporary—only effective for the seniors of that year (the applicants for fall 2021).

All the participants for this study were freshmen applicants for fall 2022. However, throughout the interviews, almost all participants did not remember any official announcement or confirmation of UC's suspension of standardized tests from fall 2021 to fall 2025 from any departments or representatives of UC Admissions, high school officials, counselors, or teachers when the policy reform press was released in May 2020. At the time of policy reform's initial implementation, all the participants of this study were sophomores in high school. However, some participants recounted that they did not realize that the policy reform also applied to them, which means that a student applicant for Fall 2022 did not have to take a standardized test or submit their test scores for UC applications. Not until their junior year, or even senior year, did

the URM student participants confirm that they were eligible for UC application with or without SAT/ACT test scores.

For example, Chris (Latinx, first-generation, UC San Diego) heard senior students talking about the policy when he was in his junior year. However, his direct reaction was thinking that UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement only influenced senior students of that year (applicants for fall 2021). It was not until his senior year that Chris confirmed that the policy reform was legitimate and that it also affected him. This was an experience that showed the URM student's low trust to the four-year higher education admissions in addition to self-deprecating thoughts due to internalized oppression:

Although in junior year, I did hear like, people will be like, Oh, guess what, I don't have to submit my SAT. So, when I heard that, I was like, Okay, it's probably just for the seniors of 2020. When we go back to school in person, I will still have to submit it. So they got lucky. But so I thought it was just a temporary policy, right. It's something because of COVID. Until the start of my senior year, I found out I also qualify for that policy. Most of the time, it just felt like a rumor, rather than an actual statement. (Chris)

In another example, Maria (Latinx, low-income, UC Irvine) described the process of seeking constant confirmation of the policy reform from college search, her counselor, and the school's website:

I knew about the policy in the middle of my junior year, it was like, in between applying to colleges, and like researching about colleges. So the only option for me was to take the SAT and when I was preparing for it was my junior year. So it was kind of in the middle of me taking the tests like between the first one and the second one. So after I took like the first one, it was like, confirmed that it was suspended. And then I wanted to retake it again to like, try to get a higher score. But at the same time, I wasn't too stressed out about it, because I knew that it was going to be suspended. Well, I heard like rumors about it, and then the counselor confirmed it. And then the UCs I think, posted about it. It was around the middle of junior year. (Maria)

These findings reveal the marginalization of URM students from the four-year higher education admissions system. The long-term oppression throughout the history of higher

education and the internalized oppression experienced by the URM students has not only led to their low self-efficacy and motivation, but also indifference, ignorance, and low trust towards the four-year higher education system.

College counselors and school and community counseling programs were critical players in helping high school students with college planning and access. They advocated for students and sought to remove barriers of the college application and access, especially for URM students (American School Counselor Association, 2019). However, eight (57.14%) of the URM student participants heard and confirmed about UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement from their teachers, peers and/or family members, instead of their counselors. For example, Camila (Latinx, low-income, first-generation college student, English language learner, UC Riverside) did not know about the policy reform until her senior year; her counselor left by the end of her junior year and there was only one teacher who knew about the policy reform:

I wasn't aware until senior year. . . . It was information from one of my teachers who then let me know that your teachers were supposed to tell you that. So some teachers weren't aware of it either. It was just one teacher who knew. (Camila)

Similarly, Diego (Latinx, low-income, first-generation, UC Riverside) learned about UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement and the test-optional policies of other universities from his teachers at the beginning of senior year:

I think just when I started like applying in senior year, I remember my teachers being like, Hey, you can take the SAT and like, add it to it, but like it's really like, like, if you do bad, don't add it if you do good, like add it. And then when they said that I was just like, cool. I don't have to take a test anymore. (Diego)

If it were not the teachers who provided the information (although not in a timely manner), Camila and Diego—or the URM students who were low-income and first-generation students like them—might have never heard about UC's elimination of the standardized tests

requirement and neither of them would have applied and attended a selective, four-year university, like a UC campus.

Indeed, some URM students did not learn about the policy reform from any of the school staff or faculty. For example, Laila, a Black student at UC Davis, mentioned that her peers casually informed her about UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement:

It was from a friend. I had heard it probably in junior year of high school, but I'm not sure. It was like it was like in a conversation with a friend right after like a soccer practice and it was just like, it was like an excited like, kind of like an almost it was also like a relief. (Laila)

Jordan (Black, UC Irvine) was informed by this mother (a college professor) about UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement. While he had barely any planning actions for college application until the last minute, his mom emphasized the policy reform at the beginning of his senior year and pushed him to apply for UC schools:

Like, because when she [my mom] told me I was like, what, like, there's like, I didn't really believe it. Because it's like, well, if that's the case, then literally everybody is just going to apply for college. And then when my school told me, and like I believed it's real. (Jordan)

The untold counter-narratives of half of the URM student participants reveals their loose connection, indifference, and limited trust towards their counselors, or the higher education application process facilitated by high school counselors. As analyzed above, the COVID-19 pandemic also caused inaccessibility and counselor resignation in public schools with limited resources, which further left URM students uncounseled during junior and/or senior years and without a source of information. In such critical situations, the researcher found that UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement—after being confirmed and recognized by the

URM student participants—increased their trust in UC’s or selective, four-year higher education admissions process, which will be analyzed in the next section.

### ***Increased Trust in Comprehensive Review of UC’s Admissions Process***

As early as 1988, the Regents of UC adopted a Policy on Undergraduate Admissions which clearly listed the selection criteria for freshman applicants with 14 factors for the comprehensive review process (University of California, 2019). However, one of these factors has been test scores of the SAT or its alternative test—the ACT. Thus, the entire policy that required and evaluated the SAT/ACT added disproportionate financial and sources barriers to the URM students, which either made many URM students ineligible for UC’s freshmen application or discouraged students without high test scores from applying to UC.

However, UC’s elimination of the standardized tests requirement broke URM students’ internalized oppression of legitimization of standardized tests and increased students’ self-efficacy or hope about getting into UCs. Without standardized test scores as a potential weakness or the hindrance of the test requirement in applying to a selective UC campus, the URM student participants believed that their strengths in other 13 factors of the comprehensive review would be holistically considered by the admissions. Once the URM student participants bought into this policy reform, they started to trust more the comprehensive review of UC admissions process.

For example, Erik (Latinx, low-income, first-generation, UC Irvine) pointed out that the policy reform built his trust towards the comprehensive review and allowed him to dream big and apply to selective, four-year universities, such as UC:

Well, I think that’s the reason that inspired me to actually want to apply as well to a four-year university. Because I think by them eliminating standardized tests, it also builds trust in a student that your entire application is being taken into consideration, not just a number you got on the big test. So, I it really allowed me to dream big and to apply to the

UCs and apply to schools I probably would have not applied to in years prior the SATs are still in place. These are all four-year universities. (Erik)

Specifically, Erik changed his attitudes and perception about the college application system as he was able to show his academic strengths through taking college-level courses and build a personal narrative of a student who balanced academics with a job and extracurriculars:

I was excited about the college system. I felt like the college application was not so much about that number anymore. It was about it was about your entire academic side. And to get you got to tell more of a narrative of who you are as a student. So, I felt confident because I was not just a student that is taking an SAT, I was a student who was balancing a job, who was staying after school every day to do extracurriculars, who was at school in the morning to also get more extracurriculars and was doing college courses. (Erik)

In another example, Maria (Latinx, low-income, UC Irvine) believed that her academic strengths—combined with extracurriculars—could solidify her admittance. UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement made her confident about entering the four-year higher education system and a highly selective, four-year university, such as UC Irvine:

Yeah, I felt like I had pretty strong academic outside of the SAT, like I had enough extracurricular experiences to get me admitted. But then I was just worried about like, standardized test scores and things like that. So I would it was very confidence when it was suspended. (Maria)

Erik's and Maria's transformed perceptions about selective, four-year college application indicate a false perception among the URM students when UC required standardized test scores: Standardized tests could determine whether a student applicant could get admitted to a four-year institution. The UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement deconstructed this false perception that had been held by URM students before the policy implementation.

Further, the policy reform increased URM students' trust on the comprehensive review elaborated in UC Regents Policy 2103 Undergraduate Admissions, or UC's selective admissions process. After the policy reform, URM participants formed a new understanding and belief that



essays, personal backgrounds, grades, and extracurriculars were evaluated by the higher education institution admissions.

For example, Diego (Latinx, low-income, first-generation, UC Riverside) had believed that four-year higher education admissions would use an applicant's SAT score to judge if they were a good student; he later changed his understanding towards the belief that UC admissions would consider an applicant's various factors and personal background through grades, extracurriculars, and essays:

It just like it makes people look at their other qualities such as like the grades or their extracurriculars. And I know UCs they had us like answer like four questions. And I think they would also look at like, kind of like their, the person's background, and what like situations they had to go through instead of like, instantly looking at their SATs scores and thinking like they're not a good student. (Diego)

In another example, Laila (Black, UC Davis) believed that UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement gave a URM student an opportunity to present their educational background, academic strengths, and/or college readiness through various aspects instead of having an SAT test score as the only indicator:

I feel like it gave them [URM students] a kind of an opportunity to be evaluated or cared more on my story and who I am rather than a score on it. And when you can talk about that in an essay, you can still portray how educated you are. And it's just a different way to portray your education. There's also the various aspects in the application. So there you can also represent your academic proficiency, I guess. (Laila)

When asked about college planning changes after knowing the policy reform, many participants brought up that they shifted or adjusted their time and commitments since they did not have to prepare for and take the SAT/ACT tests and/or they decided to apply for UCs. The time saved was spent differently—many students focused more on writing the personal insight questions (PIQs)—the four personal essays required by UC application—trying to present who

they are and share personal background. The time was also allocated for preparing for AP tests, completing advanced courses, conducting extracurricular activities, exploring major and career interests, and working part-time.

For example, Ava (Latinx, low-income, first-generation, UC Irvine) described that UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement shifted her focus and time from the test with uncertain results to schoolwork and application essays writing, which prepared her to apply and attend a highly selective UC campus:

Because I didn't have to worry about studying for an SAT that I didn't know if I was gonna get a good score on or not, so it [the policy reform] really helped me focus on more important things like the essay and my schoolwork . . . so for college application, I focused more on writing and to get our essays good enough, not good enough, but to get essays better, I guess. (Ava)

In another example, Lucas (Latinx, low-income, first-generation, UC Santa Cruz) reallocated his time to prepare for AP exams during his junior year after he found out about UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement. While an SAT score in the student's eyes was an exam required in order to apply for a selective, four-year university, AP test scores can be used not only to show academic strength in advanced high school courses but also to acquire college units and skip some of the courses. Therefore, the policy reform allowed URM and low-income students, like Lucas, to accomplish higher and better AP test scores, which potentially saved on college costs:

So after finding that out, I think like my junior year, I wasn't as focused on getting prepared for the SATs as I was on, again, getting my extracurriculars in order and preparing for my college applications. And like getting ready to study for them. But like another thing I thought it was really helpful for it was, because at the same time that I was preparing for the SAT, I was also preparing for like AP exams and such. So it was like one less thing to worry about and getting more time to focus on my AP exams. That would be like, also helpful because it'd be like less courses that I have to take in college,

switch time and then focus more on the As and no need to prepare for SATs anymore.  
(Lucas)

Paz (Latinx, first-generation) was studying Computer Engineering at CSU Long Beach at the time of this study. Although Paz was not attending a selective, four-year university of UC, he believed that four-year universities were easier and accessible. Since the CSU system adopted a similar admissions policy of removing the standardized tests requirement, Paz was able to use the time initially planned for standardized test-taking to explore subfields in computer related engineering and eventually decided to study Computer Engineering. Then, he found out that CSU Long Beach was his first choice and eventually got accepted and enrolled:

Oh, I felt happy and it [a selective, four-year university] was easier and more attainable than before. Because I didn't have to allocate a big part of my time and as a senior to just studying and figuring out I'm gonna take this test. And it [the policy reform] gave me more time to figure out who I am placed myself as a person figure out what I wanted to do. I started looking more into . . . I already know the field I wanted to go into, but I had more time to choose and specialize the field. Because I knew there are computer science, computer engineering, more Center for Engineering. It [the policy reform] gave me more time to choose the type of engineering or computer science I wanted to do. It led me to making a wiser choice in what major I wanted to choose instead of just choosing one blindly. So then, actually CSU Long Beach became my first choice and I was happy I got in. (Paz)

### ***Increased Trust in School Counselors and Teachers***

School counselors are the authority or the individuals with power at a high school in terms of providing information and guiding students' college planning and application process. Especially for low-income and first-generation college students, counselors are supposed to provide critical information about school search and choice, major selection, financial aid, scholarships, etc. Therefore, counselors could heavily influence whether a student applies to four-year universities or community colleges, and what specific programs and major fields a student applies for and studies. Although some of the URM student participants had been

ignorant or not had timely information about UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement from their school counselors, once they confirmed and learned about the policy reform, many of URM student participants started to rely heavily on and trust their counselors' authority and expertise. Natalia (Latinx, first-generation, UC Riverside) had such transformed experiences with her counselor:

My counselor didn't really tell us anything about the SATs. We just basically found out on our own . . . well, at first beginning my junior year, I was thinking about just applying to community colleges. I still hadn't heard that the SATs weren't required. But the . . . during the first day of my senior year when I found out through my friend, she told me Hey, SATs aren't required anymore. You can apply to UCs now. I started doing my own research and I figured out that yeah, SATs aren't required. So I got the courage to apply to UC. (Natalia)

Initially, Natalia heard about the policy reform from her friends, but after confirming its legitimacy, she started to trust her counselor on school choices and college applications.

Meanwhile, teachers' roles were also important in advising her throughout her college application process:

I actually relied a lot on my counselor because she helped me decide which schools were best for me. I also relied a lot on my English teacher, because she helped me on my essay, she helped me correcting my essays. And she told me which questions of the UC application I should answer. (Natalia)

Similarly, Isaac (Mexican American, low-income, first-generation, UC Riverside) relied on both his teacher and counselor to acquire information about college applications. He emphasized that it was his teachers who actually "brought up" his self-esteem and motivated him to complete UC application:

Yeah, I got my information from the teacher and counselor. It was really only in my senior year where I had like new teachers where they were highly motivating their students to apply to colleges. And they were like helping them out with the college questions or college planning. They were English teachers and world history, teachers and economics. Nice business teacher as well. And also my music teacher too. Especially

since I feel like I have low self-esteem especially. And they basically brought me up and told me like, hey, you could do it. And that will help. We'll be like, essentially supporting you throughout the way and also give you some guidance on where do you want to approach and stuff. They basically were the main factor and basically kind of motivated me to like, complete my UC questions. (Isaac)

These URM students' experiences indicate that they also highly trusted their teachers in navigating college planning and application process. After the policy reform, teachers who had the information and held positive attitudes towards URM students helped to grow their self-efficacy and fostered their decisions to apply for four-year universities. In these URM students' perspectives, teachers' positive attitudes and encouragement greatly motivated them to apply for selective, four-year universities like UC. Especially, these students trust mostly teachers who share their racial, class, or first-generation college student identities on information and advice regarding college application. As elaborated in Theme 3, Erik and Juliana relayed the exceptional support they gained from teachers who studied similar fields or shared similar racial, class, and/or first-generation college student identities.

URM students' increased trust towards teachers was also reflected in their engagement and collaboration in writing college application essays and having the teachers monitor their college application process. Maria (Latinx, low-income, UC Irvine) described both her counselor and English teacher as providing assistance to her entire college application process:

For my college planning, I was assisted by my school's counselor, and they would come into the classroom and talk about like a schedule of how everything should progress with our college applications and stuff. Like when deadlines were and what we should look out for. So that was really helpful. My English teacher also helped out with reviewing my UC essays. So that also assisted with my application experience. She would give me some pointers on how to make my essay sound more professional with grammar, punctuation, and shortening or lengthening my drafts. (Maria)

In another example, after changing his perception about UC's admissions and trusting the comprehensive review, Diego (Latinx, low-income, first-generation, UC Riverside) considered his teachers in senior year to be the most helpful resource for his application process to a selective, four-year university:

Our government teacher and our English teacher for senior year, at least from my high school. They were like the biggest support. They helped, they like, would have, like certain days where we would do our applications to college. They helped us with the four questions for the UCs. (Diego)

These findings indicate that after URM students confirmed UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement, they not only increased trust in the comprehensive review of UC's admissions process, but also increased trust in their school counselors and teachers. While counselors were traditionally considered as the staff at secondary schools to facilitate students' college planning and application process, URM student participants revealed that teachers actually held a similar level of credibility, expertise, and influence as the counselors. Both counselors and teachers could influence students' self-efficacy, motivation, decision for four-year higher education application, and were similarly trustworthy in URM students' eyes in providing information and guidance regarding financial application, school choices, essay writings, and personal backgrounds of college application.

### ***Increased Fairness and Opportunities of Admissions Process but Not Necessarily Equity***

Among the 14 URM student participants, six (42.86%) of them reflected that the policy reform increased fairness of college application process after the policy reform: Suspending standardized tests removed the resource and financial barriers that disproportionately hindered URM and low-income students from accessing four-year higher education and the advantages of White and middle-to-upper-income students. For example, Alexis, a Latinx low-income, first-

generation college student at UCLA (the most selective UC campus), was selected to a college-bound program that only supported five students each year in the school to pursue higher education and described that she was able to access a few materials and classes to prepare for the SAT:

My school reached out to us about a program that I mentioned before called College Match. So, I personally did, compared to my other classmates, because like I said, it was only five students, four students, including me, who were accepted into this program. And we have like a personal college counselor who we met with every single week, discussed like different extracurriculars we could take part in, like fly-in programs I mentioned, I only found out because of this program. And I did two during my senior year one with Dartmouth and one with Amherst College in Vermont, I think. And we have an SAT teacher every Friday for three hours. They gave us two textbooks for us to study the SAT. Five, almost five hours of homework extra for the SAT class. (Alexis)

While accessing such selective college-prep programs, Alexis became aware of her privilege of being one of the five students selected by her high school and the privilege of students with college preparation and test preparation resources from the household. Meanwhile, she realized that in order to achieve high test scores on the SAT/ACT, one needed resources to learn about the tricks of the test, which put students without or limited test preparation resources at a disadvantage in college admissions, especially to selective, four-year universities:

I feel like it's more of like the resources you have to actually get like a decent score. Because I know like for example, a friend from my high school, his mom's a teacher and then like he prepared for the SAT since he was middle school. He has actually a really good SAT score, like 1500. I guess like definitely example of like having and support, and guiding to actually prepare you. He has a lot of textbooks, whereas other students in high school like this type of support and like preparation needed to like take SAT. So it depends on whether students have resources. (Alexis)

Then, with such understanding, Alexis pointed out that UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement was developed based on the consideration of uneven test-taking opportunities and resources accessed by different groups of students. The policy reform removed

barriers, or an inaccessibility to test preparation resources experienced by some of the subgroups of college applicants and created an “equal playing field for everyone” in terms of standardized tests:

I feel like they [the UC Board of Regents] are taking into consideration how there’s kind of subgroups of people who either have opportunities and resources and, like, others who don’t. So they’re kind of like, they’re not removing it just for one particular group, but then removing it for all of them just to, like, ensure that there’s like an equal playing field for everyone. (Alexis)

Similarly, Camila (Latinx, low-income, first-generation, English language learner, UC Riverside) appreciated UC’s elimination of the standardized tests requirement as it put students who did not have test preparation resources, access to those resources, or time and energy for test preparation at fair advantages as those who did. It is worth remembering that Camila was one of the students who did not have a counselor during her senior year, lacked support from her family as a first-generation college student, learned about the policy reform in her senior year from a teacher, and overcame multiple difficulties—including language and financial barriers—to eventually access and enter UC Riverside. She exemplified the internalized oppression of legitimization of the standardized tests requirement and multi-layered systematic oppression of higher education due to her intersectional identities, but she still considered the policy reform as a beneficial one for students like her that removed disadvantages while not hurting anyone:

The policy benefits anyone who just doesn’t have the same resources or access to resources that have given them tutors that give him the time and energy to really put in that studying that they really need for certain tests. It’ll give them equal access to the resources that other students already have or have access to. It wouldn’t hurt anyone except the students who solely rely on those resources to get in. And once it’s equal, it puts everyone at a fair advantage. (Camila)



In another example, Jordan identified that UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement made the college application to selective, four-year universities fairer by removing the advantages of students with higher-income or financial resources for test preparation:

It [the policy reform] makes the application process like more fair, because the people who are paying for tutors, and like all the resources to take the SATs, like they don't have that advantage anymore. So, then it's literally just how well you do on your application and not how much money you have to put into resources and tutors. (Jordan)

Maria (Latinx, low-income, UC Irvine) considered that the policy reform increased access to four-year higher education for herself and many URM students by removing barriers related to SAT test preparation:

I agree that the UC suspension of standardized tests advances higher education equity, because well, I personally felt I had more access to higher education after they suspended the SAT, because I was no longer being judged by the SAT score I was able to get. And I feel like in order to get that high SATs score again, I needed the sufficient resources to do well on that. And I think that a lot of underrepresented minority students don't have access to the resources as well. So by suspending the SAT score, I think it opens up the door to more students applying and more students actually getting into four-year higher education. (Maria)

Along with increased fairness and removed barriers related to standardized tests, eight (57.14%) of the URM student participants, including Maria, affirmed that UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement opened doors and increased opportunities for students to access four-year higher education. For example, Ava (Latinx, low-income, first-generation, UC Irvine) agreed that the policy reform advanced four-year higher education equity as it gave more opportunities for URM and low-income students to apply and access four-year higher education:

I agree that it [the policy reform] requires an equal opportunity and does more good for the minority and for lower income students, because the minority and the low incomes had barriers of not having the resources to study and really focus on taking a standardized test, like a high standard test scores. This policy [reform] just demolished that aspect. So especially for minority and low income students, barriers of not having the resources to

study or getting higher score is removed. So there are more opportunities for them to apply and access Higher Education. (Ava)

Similarly, Natalia (Latinx, first-generation, UC Riverside) also shared that the policy reform advanced higher education equity because it gave many students with low SAT scores opportunities to apply to UCs:

I feel like it does advance higher education equity, because it gives more students the opportunities to apply to UCs, because with weaker SATs, a lot of students were discouraged to apply to any UCs because they knew they didn't have the chance because of these standardized tests. But once they were removed, they were thinking, Oh, my God, I can apply. Because I don't have to take these tests that require a lot of knowledge. (Natalia)

However, among the eight students who agreed that the policy increased higher education opportunities, four of them also pointed out that the increased competition that come along. For example, Camila was aware that UCLA's freshmen admissions rate decreased to about 8% for fall 2022 entrance. Although UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement increased opportunities for URM students to apply for a UC campus, the increased competition among all applicants and selectivity level were also evident:

So, it does make it more difficult, because a lot of people do see that they now have equal footing, to the same to the same school, so many more people apply, which is, which reduces a lot of the acceptance rates like UCLA is this year that dropped to 8%. But I enjoy the fact that a lot of people are now deciding now I have a chance to get into college, I now have the chance to really pursue an education, which is something I didn't have the opportunity for before. Thus, I believe that with this policy, minority students will now see a bigger chance in pursuing an education. (Camila)

Still, Camila was very positive about the policy reform and believed that URM students and communities would have access to the four-year higher education system. As explained below, she emphasized the significance of opportunities for minority students on moving forward from high school to higher education. However, whether the policy reform was effective

and created real impact—meaning increasing numbers and proportion of minority students attending and completing higher education—was not explored and was unknown by both the participant and this researcher:

We're in minority communities, it's very common for students to be close knitted to their families and straight out of high school work. Me personally being in a Hispanic community. You're not . . . it's usually told that you're supposed to stay home that you're supposed to stay with your family at all times, work and kind of support the family. But I feel that now that this gives an opportunity for minority students to move on and proceed to get an education there will be a higher rise in minority students entering college. (Camila)

Isaac also recognized the increased competitions, as the policy reform allowed more people to apply for UCs. One potential effect of the policy reform was that the students needed to build their background of the other 13 factors of the comprehensive review, thus involving more extracurriculars and individualized activities outside the schoolwork. Therefore, it is reasonable to consider that—although UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement has removed barriers related to standardized tests—the increased competition could lead to costs and barriers related to those extra commitments:

I think it's a good thing because it lets more people apply even if they didn't do well on a test or it makes it so many people apply. But on that one part, it makes it so there's way more competition, which means you have to do way more things outside of school. But you have an edge over other people. (Isaac)

Overall, among the 14 URM student participants, eight (57.14%) believed that UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement advanced higher education equity, which is defined by this study as equal opportunity of accessing education through removing barriers and addressing long-term disparities faced by underrepresented minority students. The remaining six (42.86%) URM student participants partially agreed that the policy advanced higher education admissions equity. They recognized the complexity of the higher education equity advancement

and identified many aspects of equity advancement that were not addressed by this policy reform, such as disparities among high schools, financial and resource barriers of accessing higher education due to intersectional identities, and multi-layered internalized oppression. However, it is reasonable to say that UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement increased fairness and opportunities of applying and accessing selective, four-year higher education of UC campuses.

### **Conclusion**

Since the early 20th century, the SAT and ACT were adopted by private universities in the United States as part of the admissions requirement for freshmen applicants. Since 1958, the University of California Board of Regents also required standardized tests scores for the university's freshman admissions process (University of California, Los Angeles, 1958). However, the fact that standardized tests were intrinsically racist and commercialized created a decades-long industrial complex surrounding the SAT and ACT, which added disproportionate financial and resource barriers for URM and low-income students to access four-year higher education (Del Carmen Unda & Lizárraga-Dueñas, 2021; Douglass, 2020; Rosner, 2011; Soares, 2011). Therefore, the previous UC's undergraduate admissions policy that required standardized tests discriminated against non-White and low-income students and normalized racism within the four-year higher education admissions system. Admissions policies like this had made the four-year higher education admissions an oppressive system that had been perpetuating for nearly a century.

The URM student participants' perceptions and attitudes towards UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement imply that the policy helped to break the long-term systematic

oppression of college admissions towards URM students and low-income students. After UC eliminated the standardized tests requirement, URM students did not have timely and reliable information about the policy reform—many of them learned about it a year or two years after its implementation and from individuals other than counselors, such as teachers, friends, and family members. However, after the URM students confirmed that they were also affected by the policy reform, they started to develop the understanding and discourse that students without standardized test scores or high-test scores were eligible to apply for and access selective UC universities. They indicated that the policy reform removed financial and resource barriers related to test preparation and considered that it made the admissions fairer, or it put all applicants on an equal playing field.

A significant influence of the UC's policy reform was the shift of the URM students' beliefs about the admissions process from considering the standardized test scores as the only—or most important—determinant of an applicant's admission result to UC admissions to trusting the holistic review of the other 13 factors (University of California Office of the President, 2019). The new belief about UC admissions indicates the alleviation of internalized oppression brought by the almost-a-century-long standardized tests requirement experienced by the URM students. Such shifts of the URM's internalized oppression increased their self-efficacy and motivation level and/or brought optimism and hopes for URM students to apply and get into selective, four-year universities. Indeed, eight (or 57.14%) of the URM student participants became inspired and applied to UCs. By eliminating the standardized tests requirement, UC's built trust among URM students in UC's selective, four-year higher education admissions system. Specifically, they believed that their academic backgrounds could be shown through

high school grades, AP exams, and college-level courses and considered their extracurriculars and work experiences to speak for themselves and their abilities to succeed in college.

Furthermore, after UC eliminated the standardized tests requirement, URM students increased trust in and relied heavily on their counselors and teachers—especially those who shared their identities—to navigate their college planning and application processes for selective, four-year universities, including school choice, major selection, essay writing, financial aid, grants, and scholarship applications.

Regarding higher education equity, each URM student participant agreed that UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement removed financial and resource barriers and stress related to standardized test preparation. Most URM students agreed that the policy reform increased fairness of UC admissions system and increased opportunities for them to apply for and attend selective, four-year universities. However, URM student participants with intersectional identities of low-income, immigrant, language learner, and first-generation college student experienced multi-layered oppression of four-year higher education admissions and disproportionately internalized oppression of various college planning and application barriers related to their identities: lack of family support, lack of information and guidance, and limited choices due to financial barriers. Meanwhile, the COVID-19 pandemic and distant learning negatively and disproportionately influenced URM students with intersectional identities: demotivation, stress, delayed communication and inaccessibility to teachers and counselors, difficulties of transition between learning modes, and financial pressure and crises.

Additionally, along with increased opportunities, a few URM students also recognized the increased competition and selectivity of UC campuses (especially those of the highly

selective campuses), which aligned with UC's freshman admissions data. Therefore, the perceptions and experiences of URM students indicates the complexity of higher education admissions equity advancement. UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement was just one policy reform that could not stand alone to effectively remove the multi-layered barriers and advance higher education equity for all URM students, especially those with intersectional identities of class and parents' education. Chapter 5 further discusses potential effective practices and policies for secondary school administrators, counselors, teachers, higher education administrators, and policymakers to advance higher education admissions equity.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

#### Introduction

In May 2020, UC Regents Policy 2103’s reform of suspending the standardized tests requirement for freshmen application since fall 2021 to fall 2024 was implemented to advance higher education equity, as the COVID-19 pandemic heightened the socioeconomic gap and more heavily influenced URM and low-income students than other students (University of California Office of the President, 2020). This critical policy analysis research sought to explore the immediate influences and effects of this policy reform on its selective, four-year higher education admissions system and UC admissions system’s equity. From demographic surveys, focus groups, and in-depth interviews with 14 URM student participants in California—who applied to at least one UC campus for fall 2022’s freshman admissions and currently enroll in four-year universities—this research explored, interpreted, and relayed counter-stories of their college planning and application experiences after UC eliminated the standardized tests requirement. The data analysis and findings focus on the four themes to answer the research questions, and following the data analysis, this chapter critically discusses the research findings through the following four aspects:

1. Improving College Access for URM Students: A Multi-Player Support System,
2. Four-Year Higher Education Enrollment and Success After the Policy Reform,
3. Addressing Long-Term Disparities of Secondary Education System, and
4. UC’s Counter-action of Proposition 209 and the Supreme Court’s Rulings in 2023.



Following the discussion of these four aspects, I provide implications for future policies, practices, and research directions of higher education admissions equity, URM students' access to highly selective higher education, and race-neutral admissions policies to advance the first two factors. Lastly, this chapter critically concludes with an examination of UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement's implementation outcomes for the first two years and changes of opportunities and access to highly selective UC campuses through the lens of higher education interest convergence in the post-COVID-19 pandemic era.

### **Discussion**

The following sections discuss the research findings surrounding three topics: (a) Improving College Access for URM students: A Multi-player Support System, (b) Increasing Enrollment and College Success after Admissions, and (c) Addressing Long-term Disparities in Secondary Education System. These topics engage discussions involving various stakeholders, institutions, and agencies of and related to the U.S. higher education system and multiple levels of policies and practices. For each topic, I reflected on the unanticipated findings and emergent themes, compared them with the recently released quantitative UC admissions results, and discussed unresolved issues for higher education equity advancement.

#### **Improving College Access for URM Students: A Multi-Player Support System**

This research found that teachers, counselors, and peers—especially those with similar identities to URM students—also played powerful roles in hindering or inspiring URM students to pursue selective, four-year higher education. Therefore, in order to support URM students with their college planning and application, college counselors or high school administrators should recruit and involve teachers, alumni, families, community members, and current students

who share similar identities with URM students at the school or community to collaborate together and build a multi-player support system. Through this support system, URM students and those with intersectional identities could access detailed, timely, and sufficient information and guidance in college choice, major selection, online application, essays, and financial planning for college—such as FAFSA filing, grants, and scholarships application.

First, as school counselors are considered individuals with power or authority among students, URM students look upon and rely heavily on their counselors to provide guidance and information with increased trust in the system. Especially low-income and first-generation college students would need additional support from the counselors because they have limited support from their families or could not afford outside counselors or additional guidance. For example, Paz (Latinx first-generation, CSU Long Beach) had a very motivating counselor who not only provided information about college applications, but who also empowered and pushed him to submit his college application:

As for people that went to my high school because we had a great college counselor. She kept pushing it pushing it and pushing it. She would hunt you down, if she found out you didn't do your best, but would get hunted down and she kept pushing it to all the seniors to do your best, do your best to apply to the colleges you want, to apply to community colleges, apply everything. They also gave us a bunch of information. And then she had taught students about the information and then each senior homeroom class at one of those students in there to help them to. (Paz)

Maria (Latinx, low-income, UC Irvine) also had a helpful counselor who walked into the classroom to deliver college planning and application information and ensure that students got all the deadlines and opportunities:

For my college planning, I was assisted by my school's counselor, and they would come into the classroom and talk about like a schedule of how everything should progress with our college applications and stuff. Like when deadlines were and what we should look out for. So that was really helpful. (Maria)

The URM student participants' experiences—such as Paz's and Maria's—also indicated that a counselor's sense of responsibility and attitudes towards individual students could really influence their higher education admissions and access. These students emphasized the importance of counselors in helping develop a timeline of application, pushing and tracking students' application process, and motivating and ensuring students successful submission of applications for the universities. While half of the participants reflected on a communication delay or inaccessibility to the school counselor during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is essential to ensure accessible and timely guidance for URM students' college planning and application process in this post-pandemic era.

Unfortunately, not all students were as lucky as Maria and Paz. For example, Jordan (Black, UC Irvine) experienced a confusing and self-navigating college planning and application process. He lacked important information and advice for college applications from his counselor and missed many vital deadlines for grants and scholarship applications:

I did a lot of Googling, like a ridiculous amount of Googling. And then I did ask my parents for help on occasion, like when I needed it. But other than that, like, I didn't really have any body to where I can be like, oh, like, what's the next step? Where do I go from here? And like, at the end, when I finally finished my application, that's when I learned that like, I had missed out on like, the Pell Grant and the Cal Grant, and that there was like some programs that I would have qualified for, if I hadn't missed the deadline. (Jordan)

Similarly, Natalia (Latinx, first-generation, UC Riverside) had to advocate for herself to access college planning and application resources and support from her counselors and teachers. Because her friends were more advocative than her in terms of pursuing college application opportunities, she benefited from the positive influence of her peers, but also missed some opportunities due to her introverted personality:

Some of the challenges that I encountered, where I didn't really like advocating for myself trying to get these resources. So I actually had some of my friends come with me to some to go talk to a counselor, so I wouldn't be alone. So I asked my friends, and they went with me. And they did most of the talking, but I did some of the talking. So it kind of helped me also. But at the same time, it helped more than them than it helped me. (Natalia)

According to U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2022b), the student-to-school-counselor ratio from 2020-2021 in California was 572:1. It is important to acknowledge that most URM students' experiences may resemble Jordan's and Natalia's more than Paz's and Maria's. While many public high schools in California had already had large student-to-school-counselor ratios, four URM student participants recounted that many schools and districts were understaffed with counselors during the COVID-19 pandemic. In such situations, school administrators and district leaders should not leave students to research or advocate for themselves; instead, supplementary or alternative solutions and backup plans for college counseling should always exist, such as collaborating with local universities, community-based college-bound programs, or independent/private counselors in the area.

Peers, families, and teachers are all key influencers in URM students' college planning and application process. Counselors are powerful and important influences on the students. However, they cannot stand alone to provide timely and individualized support for each student, given the reality of high caseloads per counselor. Besides the experience of Natalia—who was motivated and carried by her friends—Erik (Latinx, low-income, first-generation, UC Irvine) also exemplified this finding:

I relied more on my teachers, who were also first-gen. So, I have like my Spanish teacher Miss Luis. She was a first-gen and went to UCR. And then, I had another teacher who was a first-gen from UCSB. So, I was relying more on teachers who shared common

traits with me or common identities with me, and who understood the struggles I was going through, such as the same ethnicity. They also came from low-income, so they were really the ones who supported me throughout this entire thing. (Erik)

Individuals who share similar identities with the students, no matter teachers, peers, or family members, could emphasize with the URM college applicants regarding their racial, cultural, socio-economic, and national experiences and could motivate or demotivate their college decisions (González et al., 2005; Moll et al., 2005; Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011). With acknowledge of the funds of knowledge, a multi-player support system involving school counselors, teachers, peers, families, and community members is especially needed for URM students to access four-year higher education. Although previous studies have identified and evaluated effective college counseling programs and high school administration, in the case of California, high school administrators and counselors still need to build multi-player support systems for their URM students, especially those who are low-income and/or first-generation college students. A multi-layer support system should not only provide timely and sufficient college planning and application guidance and resources, but also consider intersectional identities and internalized oppression experienced by URM students and integrate funds of knowledge from a students' family, community, and social and cultural context, in order to advance their higher education access and equity of the entire system.

#### **Four-Year Higher Education Enrollment and Success After the Policy Reform**

UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement increased URM students' ability to access UC's selective, four-year higher education and broke the URM students' internalized oppression of the decades-long legitimization of standardized tests. However, in the long term whether this policy reform could effectively advance higher education admissions equity is

uncertain, because both counter-stories of the URM student participants of this research and first two-year UC freshman admissions statistics shared that the policy did not address barriers of college enrollment and completion after admissions to UC's selective, four-year higher education. URM students, especially those with intersectional identities of low-income and/or first-generation college students, were still vulnerable to multi-layered oppression and admissions inequities of the four-year higher education system.

Chapter 4's data analysis implies that UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement positively contributes to UC's higher education admissions equity through breaking internalized oppression of legitimization of the standardized tests requirement, removing barriers related to standardized tests, and increasing opportunities to apply and attend selective, four-year higher education. Table 12 shows the URM Freshman's applications, admissions, and enrollments' results from fall 2020 to fall 2022:

**Table 12***URM Freshman Application, Admissions and Enrollment Statistics, CA Residents (2020-2022)*

UC Campus	URM Freshman Applications			URM Freshman Admissions			URM Freshman Enrollment		
	Fall 2020	Fall 2021	Fall 2022	Fall 2020	Fall 2021	Fall 2022	Fall 2020	Fall 2021	Fall 2022
UC Los Angeles	26308	34429	38275	2720	2836	2903	1486	1565	1723
UC Berkeley	17004	22445	27335	3495	3559	3589	1442	1439	1513
UC Irvine	32075	32326	35533	4749	6431	6332	1342	2212	1937
UC Santa Barbara	23526	26008	26128	6361	6866	7146	1254	1295	1468
UC San Diego	24411	28186	31970	6112	7444	8501	1284	1720	2170
UC Davis	19602	22157	23521	6556	7415	6541	1607	1753	1462
UC Santa Cruz	18127	19458	20569	8804	9612	7997	1378	1465	1230
UC Riverside	22821	23202	22583	11756	12689	12813	2219	2226	2186
UC Merced	14137	13322	12335	12670	12713	12935	1339	1479	1367
Overall	50621	57406	59818	33012	36208	37134	13351	15154	15056

*Note.* Adapted from *Fall Enrollment at a Glance [Data Set]*, by University of California Information Center, 2022b, copyright 2023 by The Regents of the University of California; “*Table 2.1 University of California Freshman Applications by Campus and Race/Ethnicity Fall 2020, 2021, and 2022 [Data Set]*”, by University of California Office of the President, 2022c, copyright 2023 by University of California Office of the President, Graduate, Undergraduate and Equity Affairs, Admissions; *Table 2.1 University of California Freshman Admissions by Campus and Race/Ethnicity Fall 2020, 2021, and 2022 [Data Set]*, by University of California Office of the President, 2022d, copyright 2023 by University of California Office of the President, Graduate, Undergraduate and Equity Affairs, Admissions.

Table 12 presents the increased numbers of URM freshman student applicants for all UC campuses (except UC Merced), increased numbers of admitted URM freshman applicants for all UC campuses (except UC Davis and UC Santa Cruz) and increased numbers of enrolled URM freshman students (except UC Davis and UC Santa Cruz). Appendix J elaborates the freshman application, admissions, and enrollment numbers for each URM subgroup (Latinx, Black, and Indian American). The implication of statistics of UC’s URM students’ application, admission, and enrollment aligns with the qualitative data analysis of URM student’s college planning and application perceptions and experiences: UC’s elimination of the standardized tests requirement increased URM students’ opportunities to apply for and access UC’s selective, four-year higher education.

However, increased access or college admissions after the policy reform was not reflected equally in the slightly increased enrollment of URM students. Table 13 presents the calculated enrollment rates for URM students after admission:

**Table 13**

*URM Freshman Students' Enrollment Rate After Admissions, CA Residents (2020-2022)*

Student Group	Data Type	2020 Fall	2021 Fall	2022 Fall
URM Students	# of Admissions	33012	36208	37134
	# of Enrollment	13351	15154	15056
	Enrollment Rate	40.4%	41.9%	40.5%
Latinx	# of Admissions	28662	31220	31763
	# of Enrollment	11409	12946	12695
	Enrollment Rate	39.8%	41.5%	40.0%
Black	# of Admissions	3987	4608	4855
	# of Enrollment	1787	2024	2088
	Enrollment Rate	44.8%	43.9%	43.0%
Indian American	# of Admissions	363	380	516
	# of Enrollment	155	184	273
	Enrollment Rate	42.7%	48.4%	52.9%

*Note.* Adapted from *Fall Enrollment at a Glance [Data Set]* by University of California Information Center, 2022, copyright 2023 by The Regents of the University of California; *Table 2.1 University of California Freshman Admissions by Campus and Race/Ethnicity Fall 2020, 2021, and 2022 [Data Set]* by University of California Office of the President, 2022d, copyright 2023 by University of California Office of the President, Graduate, Undergraduate and Equity Affairs, Admissions.

The table suggests that while many URM students applied for and got accepted to one or more UC campuses, only about 40% of them successfully enrolled in a UC campus. After UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement, the rate of URM students' enrollment after admissions to UC's was almost flattened, and the rate of Black students' enrollment after admissions to UCs decreased.



Such findings aligned with the URM student participants' perceptions about UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement and concerns about UC's higher education admissions equity advancement. The policy reform may only increase opportunities and brings confidence and/or hopes, but not necessarily advance higher education admissions equity. URM students, especially those with intersectional identities of low-income and first-generation college student, still experience many barriers and aspects of admissions inequities that hinder them from enrolling in UC's selective, four-year universities even after acquiring admissions.

For example, Diego (Latinx, low-income, first-generation, UC Riverside) described that his low-income status limited his college application decision and school choices. Instead of comparing strengths of academic programs or school prestige, Diego compared grants and scholarships offered by each university that accepted him and decided to attend UC Riverside because the school provided additional financial support beyond Cal Grant or Pell Grant:

Um, some other barriers I had to face is picking my college wisely, because I know that I couldn't afford some of them or some things like dorming, or meal plans I couldn't afford so I had to understand how much the college will cost and how much my Financial Aid cover? Whichever one. This one was the cheapest, but like, there was other colleges that would have cost, like 7,000 dollars a year that I couldn't do. I just like, pick the cheapest one and went with it. . . . It was one in Los Angeles. I literally can't remember there was like CSU LA or something like that. Um, that one was cost 7,000. I didn't really check the other ones because I was like, so focused on going to the one in LA and then that's when I realized that it was gonna cost like, 7,000 a year. And for the cost of UCR, we like estimated it was gonna be around 1,000. I had the UCR grant. And then like a Cal Grant that really like supported us. (Diego)

In another example, Juliana (Latinx, low-income, UC Santa Cruz) described barriers experienced of transiting from high school to college after getting accepted to UC Santa Cruz, including the realistic issue of costs of transportation and moving in:

I'd say financial barrier is definitely one, and I think a big barrier from I saw in my school, was going to a school that was far away, just because a lot of us were used to

being in a small knit, tight knit community. I'd say definitely, because a lot of us also had to think about, how we're going to pay to get there. And you know, how we're going to move all our stuff who was going to help us and just the whole process afterwards to? (Juliana)

This research also found that after overcoming multiple barriers and successfully enrolling at a selective, four-year university, such as a UC campus, many URM students were still vulnerable to the multi-layered systematic oppression of the U.S. higher education system and its resulting internalized oppression. When the URM student participants were asked about their confidence and concerns of completing college and acquiring a four-year bachelor's degree, the multi-layered internalized oppression and financial and resource barriers still negatively influenced their self-esteem and stress level of academic and college life.

For example, Alexis (Latinx, low-income, first-generation, UCLA) expressed concerns about her ability to succeed in college because she came from a public high school with limited academic resources. At the time of the study, as a freshman student who had enrolled for two weeks, she was motivated and willing to advocate for herself to acquire the support and resources she might need:

I feel like although I like academically, I'm not sure if I'm like well enough because my high school like I said, it wasn't like the best academically, but I've always been like a motivated person. So I guess it's just within myself to actually push through like, like adverse adversities and actually try and like reach out to like professors and like, get the help I need to ensure I succeed. (Alexis)

In another example, Maria (Latinx, low-income, UC Irvine) believed that she was prepared for general education but was concerned about major or upper-division learning and career development due to limited access to relevant support and resources:

I think it was very well prepared for like college liberal, liberal courses because the program that I was in in high school, they had like a set type of classes for us to take that would help us get credit for college, and also a certain amount of like APs that we had to

take. So that really helped in preparing me for college. I'm not sure how well I prepared for completing the degree only because I didn't really, I wasn't able to access like any internships or things in the field that I am majoring in right now. So it's like, I'm not exactly sure if that's the major I'll have once I graduate, but I do feel confident in my ability to take on a college level class. (Maria)

Meanwhile, Maria was concerned about her time management and health in order to proceed and complete a four-year higher education, because she had to commute to save the costs for boarding and also work part-time to supplement her college costs:

I'm a little bit concerned about like, my health, because I found like commuting and maintaining a part time job in order to like, pay for everything that I need. And I'm also want to participate in like extracurricular activities as well as staying on top of my classes. I'm like, am I gonna get enough sleep? Like, I think that'd be the only concern about like, what toy would take being like, so busy all the time. But I think that it does that. If like, doing all those things affects my health, then I have to like for your range. And maybe I'll take longer on my getting my degree, maybe my college experience will look different. But other than that, my only concern would be the major. (Maria)

In conclusion, increased college admission does not equal increased enrollment, college success, or completion of a selective, four-year higher education. The long-term effects of UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement on college enrollment and completion remain uncertain. The URM students' college applications, admissions, and enrollment should be continuously tracked and analyzed to determine the impact of UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement, as at the time of data analysis and discussions, it was only the third year of the reform's implementation.

### **Addressing Long-Term Disparities in California's Postsecondary Education System:**

Regarding equity advancement through UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement, most URM student participants agreed that the policy reform could contribute to the four-year higher education admissions equity, but at the same time recognized the complexity of the inequity in higher education system. Higher education admissions inequity traces back to the

long-term disparities in secondary education, so there is also an urgent need for effective policies and programs to address inequities of educational and counseling resources and opportunities in lower-level education systems in the United States. For example, Erik (Latinx, low-income, first-generation, UC Irvine) described the policy as “a step closer to equity”:

I think it does. I think it's a step closer to equity. I don't think it solves the entire inequities in the UC applications. But I think it's definitely a step in the right direction. I think I don't know if you've seen that image of like equality versus equity. And there's just someone who's tall and can see over the fence. So, I think it definitely is building that gap. It built that block amongst all URM students who are applying to schools to use, so yes definitely. (Erik)

From Erik's description, UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement only removed one aspect of inequities faced by URM students in higher education admissions and did not necessarily build blocks for equity. Laila (Black, UC Davis) considered that the policy reform took away one of the roadblocks that hindered URM students to access UC's selective, four-year higher education:

I do agree that the policy reform advances higher education equity, but I think that there are things that they could do to further that even more. It's just, I feel like it's just one roadblock that they took away out of the many roadblocks that they are in directly related to [entering into] the UC system. I feel like there's still something they could do for more underrepresented people. And like the people that haven't had the same like . . . I haven't had the same opportunity of like, I feel like there's a lot more that they could do to help those students. (Laila)

Table 14 demonstrates the URM students' applications, admissions, and enrollment proportion to all students in California from fall 2020 to fall 2022, which indicates a slightly increased representation of URM students in UC's selective, four-year higher education:

**Table 14***URM Freshman Students' Application, Admissions, and Enrollment Proportion to All Freshman Students, CA Residents (2020-2022)*

Student Group	Data Type	2020 Fall	2021 Fall	2022 Fall
URM Students	Application	44.7%	44.8%	45.2%
	Admissions	41.3%	43.0%	43.5%
	Enrollment	35.0%	38.0%	37.7%
Latinx	Application	38.1%	37.8%	38.1%
	Admissions	35.8%	37.1%	37.3%
	Enrollment	29.9%	32.4%	31.8%
Black	Application	6.1%	6.6%	6.5%
	Admissions	5.0%	5.5%	5.7%
	Enrollment	4.7%	5.1%	5.2%
Indian American	Application	0.48%	0.45%	0.58%
	Admissions	0.45%	0.45%	0.61%
	Enrollment	0.41%	0.46%	0.68%

*Note.* Adapted from *Fall Enrollment at a Glance [Data Set]* by University of California Information Center, 2022, copyright 2023 by The Regents of the University of California; *Table 2.1 University of California Freshman Applications by Campus and Race/Ethnicity Fall 2020, 2021, and 2022 [Data Set]* by University of California Office of the President, 2022c, copyright 2023 by University of California Office of the President, Graduate, Undergraduate and Equity Affairs, Admissions; *Table 2.1 University of California Freshman Admissions by Campus and Race/Ethnicity Fall 2020, 2021, and 2022 [Data Set]* by University of California Office of the President, 2022d, copyright 2023 by University of California Office of the President, Graduate, Undergraduate and Equity Affairs, Admissions.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2022), California's population in 2022 was composed of approximately 34.7% White residents (not Hispanic or Latino), 40.3% Hispanic or Latino residents, 6.5% Black or African American (alone) residents, and 1.7% of American Indian and Alaska Native (alone) residents, with a note about Hispanic or Latino residents: "Hispanics may be of any race, so also are included in applicable race categories" (United States Census Bureau, 2022). With reference to the California population composition based on ethnicity, the URM freshman students' application proportion to all students, which was 45.2% in 2022, was approaching the URM population in California, which was 48.4% (University of California Office of the President, 2022c). Specifically, Black freshman's UC applicants' proportion to all students, which was 6.5%, equals to the Black or African American proportion

in California; Latinx had a 2% lower representation in UC applicants than in California residents, while Indian American's representation in UC applicants was just about one third of that in California residents, although with slight increase (University of California Office of the President, 2022c).

It is reasonable to say that after UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement, URM students did have slightly higher representation in freshman applicants, admissions, and enrollment for UC's selective, four-year campuses. However, as discussed from the last section, URM students' admissions and enrollment data indicates a significant dip of Latinx and Black students' representations among all admitted and enrolled students. These statistics reveal the unexplored and unremoved barriers of URM students' path to access UC's selective, four-year higher education, which aligned with experiences and perceptions of URM student participants, such as Erik's and Laila's.

Further, many students mentioned that this policy reform was just one action contributing to UC's higher education admissions equity and inclusivity. The disparities among URM students and White students in higher education access also resulted from disparities of resources in different school districts on top of their personal backgrounds of race, class, and parent background. For example, when Laila shared that there were many other roadblocks for URM students to access higher education, she pointed out the unequal educational resources and opportunities in the U.S. high school system. Especially, many public high schools have low educational and college counseling resources, and such disparities in high school system are not yet addressed and could really hinder URM students to access four-year higher education:

I would say public schools are just, I mean, not necessarily mine, I went to a fairly good school, but there's a lot of public schools that aren't doing that, teaching their students.

And they aren't doing educating their students on how to go to college, and they're betting against their students even going to college. And I know, that's not like the UCs fault. But I think that there is still something that can be done by people that are in power kind of thing. And if you've had data to use that kind of thing. (Laila)

Similarly, Alexis emphasized the unequal access of opportunities and resources among high schools with different levels of funding. Such funding disparities determined the educational resources and learning outcomes of the students, which then influenced students' college readiness and success:

One can work hard and get good grades within high school but they don't have like the foundation needed to like actually do well in college, it's kind of like worrisome. And in my situation, like I didn't go to like the best high school compared to like shooting to probably come here. There's just I feel like there's always going to be like a gap because not everyone has like certain opportunities or things. . . . There's like different groups of people who either had one to like really well funded High School and ones who did it. So their education is kind of in jeopardy because they don't have like certain resources. (Alexis)

Therefore, although UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement opened doors and increased opportunities of accessing its selective, four-year universities, some URM students were not prepared to succeed in higher education because of lack of solid secondary education foundation from under-funded or under-resourced high schools. To increase URM students' access and success in selective, four-year higher education, the long-term disparities in educational and counseling resources in secondary education system need to be addressed by the federal, state, and local governments, school districts, and community-based organizations.

### **UC's Counter-Action of Proposition 209 and the Supreme Court's Rulings in 2023**

Ever since fall 2001 admissions, UC has adopted a series of policies and programs to respond to *California Civil Rights Initiative* (Proposition 209, 1996) that bans affirmative action and improve higher education admissions equity, which includes ELC program, lowering the

weight of the SAT/ACT in the comprehensive review, expansion of ELC program, and the suspension for fall 2021 and permanent elimination of the standardized tests requirement for freshman admissions (Antonovics & Backes, 2014; Atkinson & Pelfrey, 2004; Regents of the University of California, n.d.; 2020, May 21; University of California Office of the President & Student Academic Services, 2002; University of California Office of the President, 2020; 2022a; 2022b). These studies all indicate that as long as the SAT/ACT is required, UC's freshman admissions equity can hardly be improved. This data analysis of URM students' college planning and application experiences also concluded that the removal of the standardized tests requirement motivated many students who are ethnic minority, low-income, and first-generation college students in California to apply and try to access higher education and 13 of 14 (92.9%) of participants did access UC's four-year higher education based on their admissions results.

Among all the 14 URM participants (42.9%) have not only accessed but also successfully enrolled in a highly selective UC campus. Similarly, from the admissions and access statistics, UC's elimination of standardized tests had some positive effect on advancing higher education admissions equity and diversity, with about 2% increased admissions proportion of URM students for the first two years of its implementation (University of California Information Center, 2022a; University of California Office of the President, 2022d). Furthermore, the enrollment proportion of URM students for all enrolled freshmen was 35% for fall 2020 and 37.7% for fall 2022 (University of California Office of the President, 2022d).

In June 2023, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that race-based admissions of Harvard University and University of North Carolina violated the *Civil Rights Act of 1964* and the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment in June 2023 putting an end to affirmative action



*(Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. President and Fellows of Harvard College, 2023; Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. University of North Carolina, 2023)*. As a result, for fall 2024 admissions, all the universities, no matter in which states, should adopt race-neutral admissions approaches. These rulings are controversial, as racial identity could be a crucial aspect for admissions to review holistically a college applicant's personal, family, and education backgrounds.

As the state of California banned affirmative action in as early as 1996—during which the Latino and Black students' UC enrollment decreased by half—this research of UC's admissions policy analysis provides a foundational case for other selective universities to study to develop race-neutral admissions process while ensuring diversity (Jaschik, 2023). Jaschik (2023) reported that all UC Chancellors agreed:

UC struggles to enroll a student body that is sufficiently racially diverse to attain the educational benefits of diversity. The shortfall is especially apparent at UC's most selective campuses, where Latinx, Black, and Native American students are underrepresented and widely report struggling with feelings of racial isolation.

Like UCs, after the Supreme Court ruled on the unconstitutionality of race-based admissions approaches, highly selective universities in the US—such as Ivy Leagues and public schools—previously had not banned affirmative action and may face similar severe challenges of ensuring diversity of freshman admissions and advancing higher education equity as the UCs have done since 1996 (Proposition 209, 1996). As this research found that UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement has shown an increasing trend of URM students' applicants and admissions. Selective, four-year universities may also consider eliminating the standardized tests for freshman admissions in order to remove the harms of the intrinsic racism and the testing industrial complex caused by the SAT/ACT. Nevertheless, this research also found that

eliminating the standardized tests requirement had to work jointly with other higher education policies and practices to support URM students from various ethnic subgroups and with intersectional identities in their college planning and application process. Therefore, all the selective universities in the United States—including UCs—should continuously seek solutions to advance admissions equity and access for URM students through race-neutral admissions methods.

### **Research Implications**

This critical policy analysis research studied a policy reform that was developed and implemented after the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak. While UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement allowed URM students to apply for and access four-year higher education, many non-URM students without standardized test scores also took advantage of the policy reform. They applied to more selective, four-year universities, like UCLA and UC Berkeley. Therefore, it is essential to learn about the URM students' college planning and application experiences and their perceptions of higher education admissions after the policy reform to explore how and why the policy reform advances or not higher education admissions equity. From analyzing, interpreting, and relaying counter-narratives of URM students' experiences and perceptions, the researcher examined the immediate implementation effects of UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement through tenets of critical race theory and internalized oppression.

The research found that UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement built trust among URM students in the higher education admissions system, disrupted their tendencies of internalized oppression about the legitimacy of the standardized tests as requirement of

higher education admissions policy as a measure of their abilities, reconstructed their perceptions towards four-year higher education application, and increased their self-efficacy, motivation, and hope of accessing selective, four-year higher education. As a result, more URM students—including those with intersectional identities of low-income and first-generation college students—applied and received admittance to UC’s highly selective campuses.

Nonetheless, UC admissions statistics indicated that the enrollment rate after admissions of URM students was still low compared with those of White students. The URM students’ enrollment proportion to all students—although with a slight percentage increase—was still lower than the URM students’ application and admissions proportion, and lower than the URM population’s proportion to all population in California. Meanwhile, the policy reform’s implementation had already increased competition or selectivity of all UC campuses, especially for its six highly selective campuses. These results imply that URM students, especially those with intersectional identities of low-income and first-generation college students, still experienced multiple barriers to access higher education and are still vulnerable to multiple forms of systematic and internalized oppression of UC higher education admissions systems. Increasing opportunities and admissions did not mean increased enrollment and college success. The long-term impacts and effectiveness of UC’s elimination of the standardized tests requirement are still uncertain. Thus, future policy, practices, and research of UC’s admissions policy and higher education equity should consider the following four directions.

First, disrupting and eliminating multiple forms of internalized oppression experienced by URM students is crucial for them to access and succeed in selective, four-year higher education. Therefore, two additional questions can be considered for future research: (1) How

could stakeholders of all levels (including students, peers, teachers, counselors, high school administrators, community-based organizations, and higher education administrators and policymakers) form a multi-layer support system to address the multi-layer internalized oppression experienced by URM students?; and (2) While several studies examined effective counseling and college transition practices for URM students (American School Counselor Association, 2019; Johnson, 2017; Militello et al., 2009; Sackett et al., 2018), none focused on the impact of and strategies to disrupt internalized oppression for URM groups and/or individuals.

Second, it is worth exploring whether and how the URM students who did not have standardized tests or high-test scores and are currently enrolled in a UC campus persist, are continuously enrolled and complete bachelor's degrees in selective, four-year higher education. Meanwhile, further research can explore how these URM students' unique experiences of demotivation, mental health challenges, distance learning, and difficulties adapting to different learning formats due to the COVID-19 pandemic impacts on their college success. Additionally, longitudinal research with the URM student participants of this study—or those with similar backgrounds and experiences—could provide more data and content to analyze and explore how UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement influences URM students' success and completion of the four-year higher education in the post-COVID-19 pandemic era.

Third, the long-term disparities in California's secondary education system must be addressed by the University of California Board of Regents and national and state Departments of Education through policy and legislation. Creating coherent P-21 policies can facilitate equity access and success between local governments, primary and secondary schools, and community-

based organizations to develop effective implementation methods or programs to provide necessary resources and guidance for college planning and application in underserved districts, communities, and families. The UC and the U.S. Departments of Education should help strengthen its impact and access desirable URM students.

Fourth, in this post-pandemic era, whether UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement will be continuously implemented or revoked is a meaningful direction to be followed and explored, as the standardized tests have been accessible at many high schools again since school reopening in fall 2021 or spring 2022. Selective private universities—such as Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Georgia Institute of Technology—have already reinstated the standardized tests requirement for their holistic review admissions processes since fall 2022 freshman admissions (Georgia Tech Undergraduate Admission, n.d.; Schmill, 2022). The future development of UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement can provide critical insights into the rationale and priority behind the University of California Board of Regents' policy making and higher education admissions equity.

Finally, considering the national legislative trend of banning affirmative action of race-conscious admissions, highly selective universities—such as Ivy Leagues, UCLA, UCB, and UNC—currently have different admissions policies regarding the standardized tests requirement: elimination and no consideration, permanent optional submission, temporary optional submission, required submission, and substitutes with other tests, such as AP exams. Even the extensive race-neutral efforts of UC and other policies that permanently eliminate the standardized tests requirement only slightly advanced the higher education admissions equity and student diversity. Future exploration on whether all elite universities in the United States

should consider eliminating the standardized tests requirement while developing other effective race-neutral admissions policies to increase URM students' access to highly selective higher education.

### **Conclusion Through Higher Education Interest Convergence**

The conclusion of this critical policy analysis on UC's elimination of standardized tests requirement's immediate effects on URM students and higher education equity is approached through the perspective of higher education interest convergence in the post-COVID-19 pandemic era. Derrick Bell (1995b) proposed the principle of interest convergence: "Only when black and white interests converge, policies and legislations to advance racial equity are passed and implemented" (p. 22). According to this principle, Bell (1995b) further argued that "racial remedies, if granted, will secure the advance, or at least not harm societal interests deemed important by middle- and upper-class whites; Racial justice—or its appearance—may, from time to time, be counted among the interests deemed important by the courts and by society's policymakers" (p. 22).

### **Higher Education Interest Convergence in the Post-COVID-19 Pandemic Era**

UC's initial suspension of the standardized tests requirement was developed and implemented right after the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak in early 2020. The rationale, or prioritized factors, behind the policy reform may not necessarily be advancing higher education admissions equity, but more possibly could counteract the negative influences and barriers related with standardized tests taking caused by COVID-19 pandemic and closure of many high school campuses and test centers. However, according to Bell's principle of interest convergence, the policy reform should also benefit the status-quo (1995a; 1995b).

Among the 14 URM student participants, 12 (85.71%) indicated that UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement disproportionately benefited URM students and low-income students; eight (57.14%) of the URM student participants thought that the policy did not hurt anyone, while the rest believed that students who prepared, had high test scores, or were required to submit test scores in previous years were hurt. For example, Erik (Latinx, low-income, first-generation, UC Irvine) criticized the admissions policies that required standardized tests to determine a students' academic background and college readiness. He argued that UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement should not hurt anymore:

If I'm being honest, I don't think removing the SAT hurts anyone, or it shouldn't hurt anyone. I believe that if like I said your application shouldn't be determined on the number it should be determined as your wholeness as a student. So how involved you were in academic, your academics or how you were involved in after school things if that was a possibility, or also if you were balancing a job like showing that you can balance all those things just shows how much strength he has as a student and what things you can bring to the school. So I think the policy just expend to if the students who may have not been able to study for the tests or buy books to study for that test have shown excellency in all other aspects of their academic journeys and as growth as people. (Erik)

In the short term, however, the sudden change of admissions policy of standardized tests requirement could bring stress to those students who had already prepared for and/or achieved high test scores. For example, Lucas (Latinx, low-income, first-generation, UC Santa Cruz) thought that the policy reform hurt people with higher scores, or people with financial affordability to pay for the test preparation resources:

Yeah, I think it definitely hurts people with higher scores. And like, people that prepare for it. Like you don't necessarily need money to prepare for the SAT. But it is typically going to be easier for you if you do the money too. (Lucas)

Juliana (Latinx, low-income, UC Santa Cruz) pointed out the White privilege in society and the U.S. higher education system and that White students could be hurt by UC's elimination

of the standardized tests requirement, meaning that without the standardized tests requirement, White students could be put at a disadvantage:

I'd definitely say that the policy hurts majority of the white just because they, most of them, I'd say have more access to just overall everything. Especially, I also say, especially students who are more well-off and who can afford the resources they need and want, those with better status and who can afford the resources to do well in the test. (Juliana)

Table 15 indicates that Juliana's perspective is not entirely unreasonable. The admission numbers of URM students increased during the first two years of UC's implementation of the elimination of the standardized tests requirement, while that of White students stayed almost the same.

**Table 15**

*URM Versus White Students' Freshman Admissions and Enrollment, CA Residents (2020-2022)*

Student Group	Data Type	2020 Fall	2021 Fall	2022 Fall
URM Students	# of Admissions	33012	36208	37134
	# of Enrollment	13351	15154	15056
	Enrollment Rate	40.4%	41.9%	40.5%
White Students	# of Admissions	16438	17024	15874
	# of Enrollment	7538	7809	7163
	Enrollment Rate	45.9%	45.9%	45.1%

*Note.* Adapted from *Fall Enrollment at a Glance [Data Set]*, by University of California Information Center, 2022, copyright 2023 by The Regents of the University of California; *Table 2.1 University of California Freshman Admissions by Campus and Race/Ethnicity Fall 2020, 2021, and 2022 [Data Set]*, by University of California Office of the President, 2022d, copyright 2023 by University of California Office of the President, Graduate, Undergraduate and Equity Affairs, Admissions.

However, the enrollment rate for White students after admissions only dropped from 45.9% for fall 2020 to 45.1% for fall 2022, while that for URM students remained almost the same at 40.5% for all 2022, which is about 5% lower (University of California Information Center, 2022a; University of California Office of the President, 2022c; 2022d). Both the enrollment numbers and rates of White students imply that Whites' access to UC's four-year



higher education has not been harmed by UC’s elimination of standardized tests requirement.

The status-quo and UCs higher education opportunities of Whites have at least continued on as prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 16 presents the URM and White students’ UC application, admissions, and enrollment proportion to all freshman students:

**Table 16**

*URM and White Freshman Students’ Application, Admissions, and Enrollment Proportion to All Freshman Students, CA Residents (2020-2022)*

Student Group	Data Type	2020 Fall	2021 Fall	2022 Fall
URM Students	Application	44.7%	44.8%	45.2%
	Admissions	41.3%	43.0%	43.5%
	Enrollment	35.0%	38.0%	37.7%
White Students	Application	21.1 %	22.1%	21.1%
	Admissions	20.43%	20.1%	18.6%
	Enrollment	19.8%	19.6%	17.9%

*Note.* Adapted from *Fall Enrollment at a Glance [Data Set]*, by University of California Information Center, 2022, copyright 2023 by The Regents of the University of California; *Table 2.1 University of California Freshman Applications by Campus and Race/Ethnicity Fall 2020, 2021, and 2022 [Data Set]*, by University of California Office of the President, 2022c, copyright 2023 by University of California Office of the President, Graduate, Undergraduate and Equity Affairs, Admissions; *Table 2.1 University of California Freshman Admissions by Campus and Race/Ethnicity Fall 2020, 2021, and 2022 [Data Set]*, by University of California Office of the President, 2022d, copyright 2023 by University of California Office of the President, Graduate, Undergraduate and Equity Affairs, Admissions.

The table indicates a gap between enrollment and application of URM students—9.7% for fall 2020 and 7.5% for fall 2022; the White students’ UC enrollment patterns slightly decreased—the gap between enrollment and application for White students increased from 1.3 % for fall 2020 to 3.2% for fall 2022. This data does not reflect interest convergence. Therefore, the next section concludes whether interest convergence applies to the admissions and enrollment patterns of highly selective UC campuses.

## Higher Education Admissions Equity for Highly selective Institutions

According to the first two-year UC admission results of UC’s elimination of the standardized tests requirement, White freshman applicants increased for all UC campuses. Table 17 compares the application number, admissions rate, and enrollment rates of URM students and White students of the five highly selective UC campuses. It indicates that both White and URM students’ application numbers increased for all the highly selective UC campuses, and both White and URM students’ enrollment rates and enrollment numbers increased for two most selective UC campuses—UCLA and UC Berkeley:

**Table 17**

### *URM versus White Students’ Freshman Application and Enrollment, CA Residents (2020-2022)*

UC Campus	White Freshman Application			White Freshman Enrollment			White Freshman Enrollment Rates		
	Fall 2020	Fall 2021	Fall 2022	Fall 2020	Fall 2021	Fall 2022	Fall 2020	Fall 2021	Fall 2022
UC Los Angeles	14264	17768	18159	1149	1078	1193	54.0%	57.5%	64.1%
UC Berkeley	11052	13498	14846	849	977	1081	45.1%	45.2%	50.1%
UC Irvine	11295	12948	13598	585	498	483	22.0%	20.7%	22.0%
UC Santa Barbara	15595	18822	18835	1325	1150	996	23.0%	23.7%	24.1%
UC San Diego	13869	17071	17876	877	1022	767	18.4%	22.5%	23.0%
UC Los Angeles	26308	34429	38275	1486	1565	1723	54.6%	55.2%	59.4%
UC Berkeley	17004	22445	27335	1442	1439	1513	41.3%	40.4%	42.2%
UC Irvine	32075	32326	35533	1342	2212	1937	28.3%	34.4%	30.6%
UC Santa Barbara	23526	26008	26128	1254	1295	1468	19.7%	18.9%	20.5%
UC San Diego	24411	28186	31970	1284	1720	2170	21.0%	23.1%	25.5%

*Note.* Adapted from *Fall Enrollment at a Glance [Data Set]*, by University of California Information Center, 2022, copyright 2023 by The Regents of the University of California; *Table 2.1 University of California Freshman Applications by Campus and Race/Ethnicity Fall 2020, 2021, and 2022 [Data Set]*, by University of California Office of the President, 2022c, copyright 2023 by University of California Office of the President, Graduate, Undergraduate and Equity Affairs, Admissions.

The statistics of Table 16 and Table 17 imply two things:

1. After UC eliminated the standardized tests requirement, although the number of applicants fluctuated, admitted White students enrolled more in UC campuses with

high selectivity—meaning more proportion of the White freshman students accessed better higher education resources and opportunities.

2. The proportion of White students among all enrolled freshman students increased slightly for the two most selective UC campuses, although overall slightly decreased: White students seem to benefit from UC’s elimination of the standardized tests requirement to apply and access four-year universities with higher selectivity, such as UCLA and UC Berkeley.

These conclusions from UC admissions statistics aligned with this research’s data analysis: UC’s elimination of the standardized tests requirement’s implementation for the first two years increased White students’ opportunities of access to UC’s selective, four-year higher education after its implementation, meaning that the policy reform also benefits the status quo. The CRT tenet of interest convergence “racial remedies, if granted, will secure the advance, or at least not harm societal interests deemed important by middle- and upper-class whites” (Bell, 1995b, p. 22) is reflected by the first-two-year outcomes UC’s elimination of standardized tests requirement.

In summary, UC’s elimination of the standardized tests requirement increased White students’ opportunities to access UC’s selective, four-year higher education after its implementation, meaning that the policy reform also benefits the status quo and aligns with Bell’s (1995a) interest convergence principle. It is worth remembering that the standardized tests had been required by UC admissions for all students ever since 1958 and even after abandoning of affirmative action in California in 1996, UC Regents Policy 2103—the Policy on Undergraduate Admissions Requirements, still required standardized tests scores as one of the 14

factors of UC's comprehensive review (Proposition 209, 1996; University of California Office of the President, 2022a). The policy reform of suspending the standardized tests requirement was largely due to the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on all residents in California and nationally. Thus, two questions should be reflected and further investigated: (a) To what extent the policy reform was out of advancing higher education admissions equity for URM students? and (b) To what extent the policy reform was to remove barriers caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and distant learning for all students including White students?

Additionally, the slightly decreased number of White freshman students' enrollment rate after admissions and their enrollment proportion to all students could be attributed to the White students' enrollment decisions to only highly selective UC campuses and their decisions to apply and attend for private four-year universities, as many of them adopted test-optional or also test-blind admissions policy since fall 2021. Therefore, it is uncertain whether the policy reform has served the interests of both URM and Whites students in the long term or in the larger picture of the current international and national situations and societal, economic, and historical background. To further critically analyze the long-term impacts of the policy reform and its reflection of interest convergence requires both quantitative and qualitative methods on different scales that the elimination of standardized tests requirement applies to: statistics of UC applicants, admissions, and enrollment of URM and White students of the next few years; continue to study the experiences of URM students who enrolled in 2021 or 2022 regarding persisting and completing college; and the larger regional, national, and international contexts.

## APPENDIX A

### Regents Policy 2103—Policy on Undergraduate Admissions Requirements

#### ~~Regents Policy 2103: Policy on Undergraduate Admissions Requirements~~

~~Approved June 18, 1982~~

~~Amended May 18, 1990, March 19, 1999, September 23, 2004, September 22, 2005, and February 5, 2009~~

~~Regents Policy 2103 has been partially superseded by a [May 2020 action by the Board of Regents \(pages 26-37\)](#).~~

#### ~~A. Academic Achievement~~

- ~~(1) Freshman applicants will be required to complete a minimum of 16 high school year-long courses to be taken during grades 9 through 12. Of these, at least fifteen must be academic or college preparatory courses approved by the University and consisting of courses in a) history/social science (2 courses); b) English (4 courses); c) mathematics (3 courses including elementary algebra, geometry, and intermediate algebra); d) laboratory science (2 courses to be taken from two disciplines); e) foreign language (2 courses); f) visual and performing arts (1 course); and g) college preparatory elective courses (1 course, to be chosen from the fields listed above) (As amended March 19, 1999). Eleven academic or college preparatory courses must be completed by the end of the 11th grade. At least seven must be taken during the last two years of high school;~~
- ~~(2) The GPA shall reflect:
  - a. Grades in all approved a-g courses taken in the 10th and 11th grade; and
  - b. Extra grade points for grades received in approved honors level courses to a maximum of four courses, including a maximum of two courses taken in the 10th grade (As amended May 18, 1990). The extra points are to be calculated on a scale of A=5, B=4, C=3.
  - c. Effective for freshmen entering the University in fall 2007, the minimum grade point average required for students Eligible in the Statewide Context and Eligible in the Local Context shall be increased to 3.0 (As amended September 23, 2004).~~
- ~~(3) Transfer applicants will be required to complete the equivalent of freshman entrance requirements in English and mathematics, effective with respect to applicants for Fall Quarter 1984.~~
- ~~(4) Test Scores
  - a. Applicants for admission as freshmen must submit scores on an approved test of Mathematics, Language Arts, and Writing.
  - b. The applicant must also submit scores for approved supplementary subject matter tests to be taken in two different "a-f" subject areas listed in paragraph A(1). This requirement shall become inoperative and is repealed effective with the application and admissions process for fall 2012.
  - c. Approval of tests shall be determined by the Academic Senate through its Board of Admissions and Relations with Schools. The minimum scores acceptable shall be~~

*Note.* The document's text is crossed out because the entire policy was rescinded by the Regents of the University of California (University of California Office of the President, 2022a; 2022b).

determined by the Academic Senate through its Board of Admissions and Relations with Schools.

**B. Entitled to Review**

Effective for students entering in fall 2012, all freshman applicants who meet the Academic Achievement criteria described in Paragraph A(1), (2) and (4) will be entitled to review (ETR) at each UC campus to which they apply, but will not be guaranteed admission to any UC campus as a result of their ETR status (see Policy on Comprehensive Review in Undergraduate Admissions.)

**C. Students Eligible in the Statewide Context and Eligible in the Local Context**

- (1) Effective for students entering UC as freshmen for fall 2001, four percent of the eligible students will be identified on the basis of superior academic performance in the context of their own high school as Eligible in the Local Context. This subparagraph shall become inoperative and is repealed effective with the application and admissions process for fall 2012.
- (2) Effective for students entering in fall 2012, freshman applicants who meet the Academic Achievement criteria described in Paragraph A (1), (2) and (4) and whose combined high school GPA and test scores would place them in the top nine percent of California public high school graduates will be identified as Eligible in the Statewide Context.
- (3) Effective for students entering UC as freshmen for fall 2012, students in each participating California high school who are in the top nine percent of their class at the end of the 11th grade and meet the requirements described in A(1) and (2) will be identified as Eligible in the Local Context.
- (4) Freshman applicants deemed Eligible in the Statewide Context or Eligible in the Local Context who are not admitted to any campus where they apply will be offered admission at a UC campus with available space.
- (5) Students identified as Eligible in the Statewide Context or Eligible in the Local Context shall complete the University's course and test-taking requirements by the end of their senior year in high school to be deemed fully eligible to enroll.

**D. Reporting**

- (1) The Academic Senate, through its Board of Admissions and Relations with Schools (BOARS) will evaluate and report annually and at five-year intervals on the academic and fiscal impact of this policy; and
- (2) Based on the results of these ongoing studies, the Academic Senate should periodically consider recommending adjustments to the guarantee structure.

## **APPENDIX B**

**Action Item for Meeting of July 20, 2022: Amendment of Regents Policy 2110: Policy on Augmented Review in Undergraduate Admissions, Amendment and Consolidation of Regents Policy 2102: Policy on Undergraduate Admissions With Regents Policies on Admission 2101, 2103, 2104, 2105, 2108, and 2111, And Rescission of Consolidated Policies as Separate Policies. (University of California Office of the President, 2022b).**

**Office of the President**

**TO MEMBERS OF THE ACADEMIC AND STUDENT AFFAIRS COMMITTEE:**

**ACTION ITEM**

*For Meeting of July 20, 2022*

**AMENDMENT OF REGENTS POLICY 2110: POLICY ON AUGMENTED REVIEW IN UNDERGRADUATE ADMISSIONS, AMENDMENT AND CONSOLIDATION OF REGENTS POLICY 2102: POLICY ON UNDERGRADUATE ADMISSIONS WITH REGENTS POLICIES ON ADMISSION 2101, 2103, 2104, 2105, 2108, AND 2111, AND RESCISSION OF CONSOLIDATED POLICIES AS SEPARATE POLICIES**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The elimination of the use of standardized tests for admissions requires the amendment of the Regents Policy on undergraduate admissions requirements and prompted a comprehensive review of all of the Regents policies on admissions. A working group of representatives from the Provost's office, a campus admissions office, the Academic Senate, UC Legal, and the Regents office was formed and recommended the following proposed changes:

- Consolidate multiple policies regarding undergraduate admissions into one comprehensive Regents Policy on undergraduate admissions
- Move implementation details to systemwide guidelines
- Incorporate in Regents Policy the Board's commitment to ensuring that nonresident applicants compare favorably to California residents
- Add definitions and clarify provisions in conformance with practice
- Add links to existing admissions guidelines and Academic Senate Regulations

Other than incorporating into Regents Policy the existing Academic Senate resolution ensuring nonresidents admitted to a campus compare favorably to California residents admitted to a campus, explicitly stating that standardized test scores shall not be considered, incorporating language prohibiting preferential treatment and interference, and codifying the existing requirements for transfer student admission, no substantive changes are proposed.

**RECOMMENDATION**

The President of the University recommends that the Academic and Student Affairs Committee recommend that the Regents:

- A. Amend and consolidate Regents Policy 2102 – Policy on Undergraduate Admissions with Regents Policy 2101 – Policy on Admissions, Regents Policy 2103 – Policy on



Undergraduate Admissions Requirements, Regents Policy 2104 – Policy on Comprehensive Review in Undergraduate Admissions, Regents Policy 2105 – Policy on Undergraduate Admissions by Exception, Regents Policy 2108 – Resolution Regarding Individualized Review and Holistic Evaluation in Undergraduate Admissions, and Regents Policy 2111 – Policy on Academic Verification, as shown in Attachment 1.

- B. Amend Regents Policy 2110 – Policy on Augmented Review in Undergraduate Admissions, as shown in Attachment 3.
- C. Rescind consolidated policies: Regents Policy 2101 – Policy on Admissions, Regents Policy 2103 – Policy on Undergraduate Admissions Requirements, Regents Policy 2104 – Policy on Comprehensive Review in Undergraduate Admissions, Regents Policy 2105 – Policy on Undergraduate Admissions by Exception, Regents Policy 2108 – Resolution Regarding Individualized Review and Holistic Evaluation in Undergraduate Admissions, and Regents Policy 2111 – Policy on Academic Verification, as shown in Attachment 6.

#### **BACKGROUND**

As part of a larger governance project, the Regents Office has initiated comprehensive reviews of all of the Regents’ governing documents. According to Regents Policy 1000 – Policy on Policies of the Regents of the University of California, Regents Policies should “communicate...enduring systemwide governing principles” as a guide for action “rather than specifying operational details, restating laws or regulations, or responding to particular issues.”

When the Regents suspended the requirement for applicants to submit standardized tests for admissions in May 2020, they did not amend Regents Policy 2103 – Policy on Undergraduate Admissions Requirements. The May 2020 action included the provision that, if a test for admission meeting certain specifications could not be adopted or created by 2024, UC would permanently eliminate the requirement. The Academic Senate formed a working group to assess the feasibility of creating an appropriate test. In January 2021, it reported to the Board its conclusion that a test could not be created in that timeframe. The President of the University asked the Academic Senate to consider the adoption of an existing test, and in November 2021, the Academic Senate reported to the Board that they recommended against using that assessment. The President endorsed their recommendation, and the consideration of standardized tests for UC admissions was eliminated. Regents Policy 2103 is therefore inaccurate and should be amended. In addition, seven separate Regents Policies addressing various aspects of undergraduate admissions requirements and process should be reviewed and amended, as appropriate.

Consistent with principles of good governance, the President proposes consolidating multiple policies addressing different aspects of the admissions process into one comprehensive Regents Policy on undergraduate admissions. In accordance with Regents Policy 1000, the policy should retain key, high-level principles articulating the Regents’ philosophy on admissions, move much of the implementation detail to systemwide guidelines and/or Academic Senate Regulations, and rescind statements or resolutions that are outmoded or do not constitute policy.

In addition, it is proposed that two sections be added to the Policy to address the admission of transfer (“advanced standing”) students and the Regents’ commitment to ensuring that the academic qualifications for admitted nonresident undergraduate students exceed, on average, the academic qualifications of resident undergraduate students. These sections reflect long-standing principles that were not previously detailed in Regents Policy and are consistent with systemwide admissions procedures and Academic Senate guidance. While the proposed consolidated policy streamlines language from multiple policies, no substantive changes to policy or practice are proposed to the requirements for admission.

The proposed new Regents Policy on Undergraduate Admissions documents all elements of admissions policy and process in a single location. The policy is organized as follows:

Introductory Principles

I. Guidance

- A. All Undergraduates
  - 1. Comprehensive Review
  - 2. Holistic Review
- B. First Year Students
  - 1. Academic Achievement and Preparation
  - 2. Standardized Tests
  - 3. Eligible in the Statewide Context and Eligible in the Local Context
- C. Advanced Standing (Transfer) Students
  - 1. Academic Achievement and Preparation
  - 2. California Community College Transfers
- D. Undergraduate Admissions by Exception to Eligibility
- E. Admission of Nonresident Undergraduate Students
- F. Academic Verification

II. Governance

- A. Prohibition of Preferential Treatment
- B. Prohibition of Interference
- C. Reporting

The table below outlines a recommendation for each provision, and the text below more fully describes the rationale for each proposed disposition.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REGENTS POLICIES ON ADMISSIONS

Policy #	Subject	Recommendation
2101	Policy on Admissions	Move to Regents Policy 2102 (with one word change). Rescind policy.
2102	Undergraduate Admissions	Retain original text; add content from other admissions policies; include new language about compare favorably, transfer admission requirements, and prohibition of interference and preferential treatment.
2103	Undergraduate Admissions Requirements	Move to Regents Policy 2102 sections I(B) and II(C); delete some implementation details. Rescind policy.
2104	Comprehensive Review	Move to Regents Policy 2102 section I(A)(1); delete out-of-date references. Rescind policy.
2105	Admissions by Exception	Move high-level concepts to Regents Policy 2102 section I(D); delete obsolete references and details documented in BOARS' Guidelines for Implementation of University Policy on Admission by Exception for California Residents <sup>1</sup> . Rescind policy.
2108	Individualized Review and Holistic Evaluation	Move principles to Regents Policy 2102 section I(A); delete "whereas" statements. Rescind policy.
2110	Augmented Review	Minor amendments with no material changes. Retain as separate policy, not consolidated with Regents Policy 2102.
2111	Academic Verification	Move section (1) to Regents Policy 2102 section I(F); issue sections (2) to (7) as BOARS Systemwide Guidelines. Rescind policy.

**Regents Policy 2101 – Policy on Admissions.** The text in Regents Policy 2101 is proposed for incorporation into the Introductory Principles of Regents Policy 2102, with a single word change.

**Regents Policy 2103 – Policy on Undergraduate Admissions Requirements.** This policy articulates the academic achievement requirements for admission to the University (course requirements, grade point average [GPA], and test scores) and defines categories for eligibility

<sup>1</sup> BOARS' Guidelines for Implementation of University Policy on Admission by Exception for California Residents is available online at: <https://senate.universityofcalifornia.edu/files/committees/boars/documents/a-by-e-guidelines.pdf>

for admission for first year applicants. It is proposed that the course (A–G subject) and GPA requirements be relocated to Regents Policy 2102 I(B)(1) and that the minimum GPA for nonresidents currently in practice be included in the Policy. The test score requirement has been updated to reflect the Regents’ actions of May 2020 and relocated to Regents Policy 2102 I(B)(2). The description of the eligibility categories, Eligible in the Local Context and Eligible in the Statewide Context, have been updated and relocated to Regents Policy 2102 I(B)(3) and inoperative language is proposed for removal. The reporting requirements have been proposed for relocation to Regents Policy 2102 II(C).

***Regents Policy 2104 – Policy on Comprehensive Review in Undergraduate Admissions.*** The principles expressed in Regents Policy 2104 are proposed for incorporation into Regents Policy 2102 I(A)(1). Anachronistic references have been removed.

***Regents Policy 2105 – Policy on Undergraduate Admissions by Exception.*** The principles articulated in Regents Policy 2105 are proposed for incorporation into section I(D) of Regents Policy 2102. The implementation details are in the Guidelines for Implementation of University Policy on Admission by Exception for California Residents, a document maintained by the Academic Senate, and should be deleted from Regents Policy. In addition, anachronistic references and factual statements are proposed for deletion.

***Regents Policy 2108 – Resolution Regarding Individualized Review and Holistic Evaluation in Undergraduate Admissions.*** The principles articulated in this resolution are proposed for incorporation into Regents Policy 2102 section I(A).

***Regents Policy 2110 – Policy on Augmented Review in Undergraduate Admissions.*** This policy has been reorganized for clarity. Language in footnotes has been moved into the policy body text.

***Regents Policy 2111 – Policy on Academic Verification.*** Paragraph 1 of this policy is proposed for relocation to Regents Policy 2102 section I(F). The remaining paragraphs include implementation details, and it is recommended that they be issued as systemwide guidance from the Academic Senate and deleted from Regents Policy. (Draft Academic Verification Guidelines are shown in Attachment 8.)

**ATTACHMENTS:**

[Attachment 1 – Proposed Amendment of Regents Policy 2102 – Policy on Undergraduate Admissions \(blackline; underscore version\)](#)

[Attachment 2 \(for information\) – Proposed Regents Policy 2102 – Policy on Undergraduate Admissions \(clean version\)](#)

[Attachment 3 – Proposed Amendment of Regents Policy 2110 – Policy on Augmented Review in Undergraduate Admissions \(blackline; underscore version\)](#)

[Attachment 4 \(for information\) – Proposed Regents Policy 2110 – Policy on Augmented Review in Undergraduate Admissions \(clean version\)](#)

[Attachment 5 – Blackline of Existing Policy Language Proposed for Amendment and Consolidation into Regents Policy 2102](#)

[Attachment 6 – Proposed Rescission of Regents Policy 2101 – Policy on Admissions, Regents Policy 2103 – Policy on Undergraduate Admissions Requirements, Regents Policy 2104 – Policy on Comprehensive Review in Undergraduate Admissions, Regents Policy 2105 – Policy on Undergraduate Admissions by Exception, Regents Policy 2108 – Resolution Regarding Individualized Review and Holistic Evaluation in Undergraduate Admissions, and Regents Policy 2111 – Policy on Academic Verification](#)

[Attachment 7 \(for information\) – Draft Academic Verification Guidance](#)

## APPENDIX C

### Letter of Invitation

Yufei Chen  
July 23, 2022

Dear Student:

This is an invitation to participate in a study on the underrepresented minority (URM) students' college planning and application experience under UC's admission policy reform of suspending the standardized tests requirement from fall 2021 to fall 2024. A \$25 gift card will be awarded each participant of this study.

I am completing this study as my doctorate dissertation in the Educational Leadership for Social Justice Program at Loyola Marymount University. The title of the study is: "Influence of UC Regents Policy 2103's Reform Regarding the Standardized Tests Requirement for Freshman Admissions from Perspectives and Experiences of Underrepresented Minority Students."

In May 2020, the University of California announced its suspension of the SAT and other standardized tests requirements for freshman applicants who apply for fall 2021 and beyond. This study aims to learn from student applicants' perspectives and experiences on how the policy reform has influenced or changed their college planning and application experiences and further develop conclusions on how higher education admission policies can further advance equity.

If you identify yourself as an URM student (Latinx, Black, Indian/Native American, and/or undocumented student), I truly appreciate your participation! The time commitment includes a demographic survey, which should take about 10 minutes to complete, a focus group of 45-60 minutes, and a 45-minute interview with a few questions regarding your college planning and application experience and perceptions towards UC's admissions policy reform regarding standardized tests and higher education equity.

Your name will not be used in any public distribution of these data. When the research study ends, any identifying information will be removed or destroyed. All the information you provide will be kept anonymous and confidential.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please open the link here, fill out the demographic survey, and sign the consent form. Thanks for your participation and contribution to efforts that aims to understand and advance higher education equity in advance!

## APPENDIX D

### Informed Consent Form

- TITLE:** Influence of UC Regents Policy 2103's Reform Regarding the Standardized Tests Requirement for Freshman Admissions from Perspectives and Experiences of Underrepresented Minority Students
- INVESTIGATOR:** Yufei Chen, Doctor of Education Program in Education Leadership and Social Justice, School of Education, Loyola Marymount University; Ychen69@lion.lmu.edu; 626-709-7408
- ADVISOR: (if applicable)** Magaly Lavadenz, Department of Educational Leadership and Administration, School of Education; 310-338-2924
- PURPOSE:** You are being asked to participate in a research project that seeks to investigate how UC's Suspension of the Standardized Tests Requirement for Freshman Admissions has influenced or changed the college planning and application experiences of underrepresented minority students. As a participant, you will be asked to fill out a demographic survey which should take about 10 minutes to complete, a focus group of 45-60 minutes, and a 45-minute follow-up interview with a few questions regarding your college planning and application experience and perceptions towards UC's admissions policy reform regarding standardized tests and higher education equity. The focus group and interview will be recorded as audios for data analysis purposes.
- RISKS:** Risks associated with this study may include psycho-social risks and/or discomforts (feelings of stress, anxiety, distress, low self-esteem) when you are asked questions related to barriers and challenges of the college planning and application process, standardized tests, and higher education equity. I will answer any questions that you have about this research and the rationale/design of the focus group and interview questions to avoid/minimize any psycho-social discomforts.
- BENEFITS:** This study holds the good faith to give voices to underrepresented minority students, understand their experiences of the college planning and application, and further develop policy implications on advancing higher education equity. Your contribution to this study will benefit the URM students, researchers, policymakers, and higher

education institution administrators to continue advance higher education equity in California and the United States.

**INCENTIVES:** Participation in the project will require no monetary cost to you. You will receive a \$25 gift card for this study.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:** I will collect your demographic information in connection with the data. However, your name and any identifiers will never be used in any public dissemination of these data (publications, presentations, etc.). All research materials and consent forms will be stored electronically in a password protected program and only I will have the access to the data. When the research study ends, any identifying information will be removed from the data, or it will be destroyed. Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in a focus group setting; however, we ask all participants to respect other participant's privacy and keep all information shared confidential.

**RIGHT TO WITHDRAW:** Your participation in this study is *voluntary*. You may withdraw your consent to participate at any time without penalty. Your withdrawal will not influence any other services to which you may be otherwise entitled, your class standing or relationship with Loyola Marymount University.

**SUMMARY OF RESULTS:** A summary of the results of this research will be supplied to you, at no cost, upon request. It is expected to be completed in spring 2023. You can inquire about the data analysis process of this research at 626-709-7408 or [ychen69@lion.lmu.edu](mailto:ychen69@lion.lmu.edu).

**VOLUNTARY CONSENT:** I have read the above statements and understand what is being asked of me. I also understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time, for any reason, without penalty. If the study design or use of the information is changed I will be informed and my consent reobtained. On these terms, I certify that I am willing to participate in this research project.

I understand that if I have any further questions, comments or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may contact Dr. David Moffet, Chair, Institutional Review Board, Loyola Marymount University, 1 LMU Drive, Los Angeles, CA 90045-2659 or by email at [David.Moffet@lmu.edu](mailto:David.Moffet@lmu.edu).



---

Participant Signature

---

Date

**[If not applicable to the study, be sure to delete the following section.]**

**CONSENT TO USE IDENTIFYING INFORMATION:**

I give my permission for my name **[include as applicable: image, institution, affiliation, direct quotes, etc.]** to be used in any presentations, publications, or other public dissemination of the research findings of this study.

---

Participant Signature

---

Date

## APPENDIX E

### Demographic Survey

1. NAME  
\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ (FIRST, LAST)
2. When were you born?  
\_\_/\_\_/\_\_\_\_ (MM/DD/YYYY)
3. What is your current gender identity?
  - a. Man
  - b. Woman
  - c. Non-binary
  - d. Gender queer/Gender non-conforming
  - e. Identity not listed above
4. In what year did you graduate from high school?
  - a. 2022
  - b. 2021
  - c. 2020 or earlier
5. In what year did you enroll in college?
  - a. 2022
  - b. 2021
  - c. 2020 or earlier
6. Which college are you enrolling in?
7. You are enrolled in college as a:
  - a. Full-time student
  - b. Part-time student
8. Is English your primary language?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
9. Are you qualified for or currently receiving Pell Grants?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
10. Are you a first-generation college student?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No

11. You identify yourself as:
  - a. Hispanic/Latinx
  - b. African American/Black
  - c. American Indian
  - d. Asian/Pacific Islander
  - e. White
  - f. International
  - g. Other/Unknown
  - h. Do not want to share
  
12. Citizenship status:
  - a. Domestic Students (U.S. citizen or Permanent resident (green card))
  - b. International student (i.e., F-1, J-1, or M-1 visa)
  - c. Undocumented or DACA students
  - d. None of the above
  
13. Did you apply for the University of California?
  - a. YES
  - b. NO
  
14. If YES to Q13, which schools did you get admitted to? (Please choose all that apply)
  - a. UCLA
  - b. UC Berkeley
  - c. UC Santa Barbara
  - d. UC Irvine
  - e. UC San Diego
  - f. UC Davis
  - g. UC Merced
  - h. UC Riverside
  - i. UC Santa Cruz
  
15. Did you prepare for the SAT and/or ACT?
  - a. Only SAT
  - b. Only ACT
  - c. SAT and ACT
  - d. Did not take either test
  
16. Did you take the SAT and/or ACT?
  - a. Only SAT
  - b. Only ACT
  - c. SAT and ACT
  - d. Did not take either test
  
17. Are you willing to join a focus group and a follow-up interview to share your experiences

and perspectives related to college planning and application and UC's admissions policy? If YES, please leave your best contact email.

- a. YES
- b. NO

## APPENDIX F

### Focus Group Protocol

**Informants: URM Students Who Enrolled in a Four-Year College in Fall 2022**

#### INSTRUCTIONS

##### **Before beginning the focus group:**

1. Thank the participant and explain that the responses will be used to inform policy and research around California's bilingual teacher shortage.
2. Confirm that the participants have each completed the electronic consent form.
3. Remind the participants that the Zoom recording will be used for research purposes only and information will be reported in aggregate form.
4. Clarify that your **ROLE** in this focus group is to facilitate conversation to elucidate information about their college planning and application experiences.

**Follow the protocol.** Ask each question in order, just as it is written; allow participants to answer fully. Redirect or restate the question to glean more information.

**When to follow up.** Ask follow-up/elaboration questions if they are required for getting the participants to answer the question directly and fully. A good, all-purpose follow-up to use when an answer is minimal is "Can you elaborate?" Ask for clarifications if something is unclear.

**When to request an example.** If the participant has already provided an example when answering a question, there is no need to re-prompt, although it is always ok to ask for additional examples.

**If participants inadvertently advance to a later topic.** If a participant provides an answer to a question that is coming up later in the focus group, either:

- (1) Let him/her/them respond fully, then when you get to the question in the protocol confirm the answer (see below for strategies); or
- (2) Say you will get back to that item a little later in the focus group; make a note on the protocol so that when you get to that question you can say something like, "Ok, you started telling me about XXX a few minutes ago . . ."

**If the participants have already answered a question.** If you know the participants have already answered a question in the context of answering a previous question, here are your options:

- (1) Say, "I think you provided an answer to this question, but let me just be sure . . . [state the question]"
- (2) Say, "I believe you've covered this already, but if someone were to ask you directly, [state the question], how would you respond?"

- (3) Omit the question and state clearly that the question was not asked but you know the answer because it was answered elsewhere or the answer was obvious due to something the interviewee had said. Cite and cross-reference relevant parts of the focus group.

**Manage time carefully.** There are eight questions to the protocol. As a guideline, plan to spend NO MORE than five minutes on each question; otherwise, you will go over the 45 minutes for the interview. Be aware of time.

**A second researcher will take notes during the focus group,** but be sure that you take notes so you can track responses and refer back to them as needed, e.g., “A few minutes ago, you mentioned that . . . I’d like to go back to that now.”

## INTRODUCTION

### OPENING SCRIPT:

Hi . . . ,

Thank you for participating in this focus group today as part of my doctorate dissertation. I’m conducting this data collection to understand how UC’s suspension of standardized tests for freshman admissions since fall 2021 influences the college planning and application process of URM students. Your perspectives are extremely important in my research effort; I see you as a critical friend and hope you feel that way. Please don’t worry about giving the “right” answers—your honest responses will be incredibly valuable. And you are certainly under no obligation to answer these questions.

I am confirming that you completed an electronic consent form and that we will record this session for informational purposes only. All data that is collected will be reported in aggregate form. All data that is collected will be reported in aggregate form. [If concern is expressed about recording or participating, acknowledge that the participants have the right to withdrawal from the process at any point during the focus group.]

Although I will maintain the information shared during this focus group confidential, the nature of the focus groups brings risk of breach of confidentiality. To minimize this risk, I ask that you honor confidentiality not share what you hear with anyone outside of the focus group.

I hope to complete the focus group as efficiently as possible by taking no longer than 45 minutes of your time. I will keep us on track with questions and timing and follow the focus group protocol carefully to ensure consistency in the research/data collection processes. As a reminder, my ROLE in this focus group is to elicit information about your experience and to the extent possible, your college planning and application experience after UC’s suspension of the standardized tests requirement for freshman admissions.

I will be asking nine questions surrounding the college planning and application process, UC’s suspension of the standardized tests requirement, and higher education equity.

Before we start, may you please confirm that you do identify yourself as a URM student, right?

Do you have any questions for us before we begin? Or, with your permission I will begin recording.

### **Background**

1. Please identify:
  - a. Your pronoun(s)
  - b. The college you are attending now
  - c. The year of college
  - d. Provide a brief description of your college planning and application experience.

### **College Planning and Application Process**

2. From your college planning and application experience, what barriers did you face during your college planning and application process?
  - a. If you were able to overcome the barriers, describe how you did it.
  - b. If you were not able to overcome the barriers, what would have helped?
3. Please describe how the COVID-19 pandemic has influenced your college planning and application process?
  - a. Are there new barriers that emerged? Please describe.
4. If you took the SAT or ACT before, please describe if the SAT added barriers or stress to your college planning and application process?

### **UC's Policy Reform & Higher Education Equity**

5. How did your college planning and application process change after the implementation of UC's Regents Policy 2103's policy reform of suspending standardized tests?
  - a. What barriers are removed or alleviated?
  - b. Were there emerging barriers after the policy implementation?
6. What do you think of UC Regents Policy 2103's policy reform?
  - a. Who does the policy benefit and who does it hurt?
7. According to the federal, state, and UC's mission statements, equity means equal opportunity of accessing education through removing barriers and addressing long-term disparities faced by underrepresented minority students. How do you think this policy reform have or have not advanced higher education equity? Please explain.

### **Closing**

8. This study aims to explore the impact of UC's elimination of the standardized tests requirement from perspectives and experiences of URM students. Do you have any final thoughts to share with us today? Or have we missed anything?

## APPENDIX G

### Interview Protocol

Hi . . . ,

Thank you for participating in this interview today as part of my doctorate dissertation. You are an important partner in my research effort; I see you as a critical friend and hope you feel that way.

Our questions for you are generally about your experiences around college planning and application, attitudes and experiences towards standardized tests and UC's test requirement suspension, and the guidance and resources you received. Please don't worry about giving the "right" answers—your honest responses will be incredibly valuable. Your responses will be kept confidential, and I will share my research and findings with you if you are interested. Before we start, may you please confirm that you do identify yourself as a URM student, right?

Do you have any questions for us before we begin? Or, with your permission, I will begin recording.

#### Questions

1. To start with, how would you describe your college planning and application experience?
2. How do you think the SAT and the other standardized tests reflect students' learning aptitude and can predict your college success?
  - a. Did you take the SAT or other standardized tests? If so, what have you done to prepare for the SAT or other standardized tests?
  - b. Did you use the SAT in other college applications? If yes, how do you think the test scores helped with admissions?
  - c. How do you think the SAT may add barriers to URM students in their college planning and application process?
3. What do you think of the University of California's Regents Policy 2103's policy reform that suspends the SAT and the other standardized tests requirement?
  - a. Who does the policy benefit and who does it hurt?
  - b. How do you think it benefited you?
  - c. How do you think it benefited other URM students?
4. How did/have your perspectives or feelings about college planning and application changed after knowing UC suspended the SAT and the other standardized tests requirements?
  - a. How and when did you know about the policy?
  - b. Do you feel more confident or less confident of applying and entering a selective,



- four-year college? And what gives you that level of confidence (or lack of confidence)?
- c. Did you feel more stressed or less stressed about applying and entering a selective, four-year college? And what gives you that level of stress (or reduced stress)?
5. From your experience, what barriers have you faced during your college planning and application process?
    - a. Are there any barriers related to you racial, income, and/or first-gen status? Please explain.
  6. How did/ have your college planning and application process changed after the implementation of the University of California's Regents Policy 2103's policy reform?
    - a. What barriers are removed after UC's policy implementation of no consideration of standardized tests?
    - b. What barriers are alleviated?
  7. Did you have sufficient guidance or resources in the process of college planning and application?
    - a. [If Yes] What guidance or resources did you rely on?
    - b. [If Yes or No] Who were involved in providing these guidance and resources to you throughout the college planning and application process?
    - c. [If Yes or No] What challenges did you encounter to acquire college planning and application guidance and resources?
    - d. [If No] What guidance or resources were not available?
  8. Were there new barriers to your college planning and application process that emerged after UC's policy implementation of no consideration of standardized tests?
    - a. Were there new barriers of your college planning and application experience that emerged during or related to the COVID-19 pandemic?
  9. According to the federal, state, and UC's mission statements, equity means equal opportunity of accessing education through removing barriers and addressing long-term disparities faced by underrepresented minority students. Would you agree or disagree that UC's suspension of standardized tests advances higher education equity? Please explain.
  10. How well do you feel that you are prepared for completing college and acquiring a bachelor's degree? Please explain.
    - a. How confident are you about completing college? And what gives you that level of confidence (or lack of confidence)?
    - b. What are some concerns that you have about completing college?

## APPENDIX H

### The Second Cycle Codebook (Descriptive, *In Vivo*, and Concept codes, with double-coding for interconnected themes)

**Theory-driven codes:**

#	Code	Literature	Description/Definition	Example
1	SAT's inaccurate representation of learning aptitude	Studies for the SAT and other standardized tests indicate that the exams have limited predicting power on students' aptitude and college success and decrease diversity of college admissions when the tests are required (Atkinson & Geiser, 2009; Kobrin et al., 2008; Rosner, 2011; Soares, 2011; 2012).	Perceptions of the SAT and its alternative standardized tests as inaccurately, not necessarily, or not reflecting students' learning aptitude, college readiness, and/or college success.	"But during my whole school experience, at least from K to 12 I've always been getting decent grades. My high school GPA is 4.0, but I did like barely minimum in my SAT. It was 990 [out of 1600], so I don't think it reflects on learning aptitude I think it just reflects on whether you can you know how to take a test and use strategies to take the test." (Chris)
2	Financial barriers of the SAT and its alternative standardized tests	The SAT and its alternative standardized tests cost students and their families' money to not only register, but also afford test preparation materials, tutoring, and counseling services in order to achieve good scores for college applications. The tests add financial barriers to low-income students, many of whom are URM students, in their college planning and application processes (Douglass, 2020).	Barriers mentioned by the participants on affording or paying for the tests or test preparation resources such as study materials, workshops, classes, tutoring.	"I feel like it would create barriers because a lot of underrepresented minorities like myself, don't have the money or the resources to get those like Study guides or workbooks. So it would kind of affect our scores, it would kind of lower scores, because we don't have the same access, as other people do." (Natalia)
3	Self-efficacy and motivation	Having strength in resilience and self-efficacy is important for URM students in the process of college planning and application; low self-efficacy related to racial identity or caused by negative attitudes received based on racial identities demotivate students' pursuit for post-secondary education (Cook et al., 2015; Pérusse et al., 2017).	Self-belief on ones' ability of academics, college readiness, and/or college success. Including expressions of confidence of applying and getting into a four-year university or UC schools. Also including students' motivation	"I think the barrier would definitely be just not feeling like they are good enough or you see or are good enough to apply to a good school because of their tests score, so that can really influence student's self-esteem or confidence level." (Juliana)

#	Code	Literature	Description/Definition	Example
4	Stress of college application	According to a large-scale Princeton Review survey on college applicants and parents in 2006, more than half of the students and parents felt the stress about college applications (Ash, 2007). With the increased selectivity of the top-notch four-year universities since then, such as UC schools, the stress related to college application could only be more severe. Moreover, scholars recently studied the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on high school students and indicates higher stress, anxiety, and fear related to post-secondary education before the pandemic outbreak (Yin et al., 2022; Young, 2022).	Stress, pressure, and/or anxiety mentioned related to or during one's college planning and application process.	<p>"I feel like if it wasn't for that SAT actually get cancelled, it would have been a lot more stressful. But it ended up just giving the hope. A lot of stress went away because I already had my guidance taking the application process." (Alexis)</p> <p>"Once I started applying to colleges, it was a little stressful because I did not have the full support of my parents. They never gone through this." (Erik)</p>
5	Family support or lack of it of First-gen	Pérusse et al. (2017) found that first-generation college students may have limited resources and support from families because of their lack of experiences and information about college application and financial aid for U.S. higher education. Additionally, undocumented immigrant students lack legal status and relevant knowledge of college application and financial aid for undocumented immigrants (Perez, 2015).	<p>Support from older generations from the household, include knowledge of college planning and application, especially for four-year universities, documents of immigration or citizenship status and tax return, and emotional support for a student to apply for four-year universities.</p> <p>Excluding financial support for test preparation and taking, college application fees, tuition and other college expenses.</p>	<p>"The largest barrier I faced during college planning and my application process was being first-gen. So I had no one to ask, Oh, how do I fill this out? Or, Oh, where do I put this? Or where do I put that? Mostly, and in terms of like financial aid, I had to explain to my parents Oh, it says I need this document. But then there are certain words that I can't translate. So it would be difficult to really get through them with like, oh, I need this and this and this." (Camilia)</p>

#	Code	Literature	Description/Definition	Example
6	Counselor's role/guidance	College counselors, school and/or community counseling programs can advocate for students and strive to remove barriers of the college application and access, especially for URM students (American School Counselor Association, 2019).	Guidance, advisory, information and knowledge related to college planning and application process by college counselors at school, their assistants, interns, or other staff in the school's counseling program, such as school choice, major selection, essay writing, etc. Including guidance, advisory, information and knowledge of financial aid, grants, and scholarship applications.	"And for people that went to my high school because we had a great college counselor. She kept pushing it pushing it and pushing it. She would hunt you down, if she found out you didn't do your best, and she kept pushing it to all the seniors to do your best, do your best to apply to the colleges you want. They also gave us a bunch of information. And then she had taught students about the information and then each senior homeroom class at one of those students in there to help them to." (Paz)
7	Comprehensive review after policy reform	Since fall 2002, UC admission has adopted a comprehensive review process that considers students' personal and educational circumstances to address the dropping numbers of enrollment of racial minority students after the State of California banned affirmative actions (Antonovics & Backes, 2014; Atkinson & Pelfrey, 2004). The Regents Policy 2103, the Policy on Undergraduate Admissions Requirements, elaborates clearly on the required information and materials of freshman and transfer applicants to the University of California system for comprehensive review (University of California Office of the President, 2022a).	Perceptions of UC's comprehensive review after the policy reform, and experiences of college planning for the components of UC's comprehensive review, such as high school GPA, higher level courses such as APs, extracurriculars, individual experiences, etc.	"It made the application process easier. And like, just easier overall, and less intimidating, because it's like, if I don't have to take this test that I'm probably not even going to do good at. And the only thing that colleges are going to look at are my grades and my extracurriculars, then it's like, it makes me more hopeful that I'll get into the school that I want to get into." (Jordan)

#	Code	Literature	Description/Definition	Example
8	Financial barriers of college application & enrollment	Students have financial concerns about applying and paying for college especially four-year institutions; students especially first-generation college students and their families have limited information and experience about applying for financial aid, grants and scholarships (Cook et al., 2015; Pérusse et al., 2017). Financial concerns and lack of information and guidance on financial planning for college impede many students pursue higher education.	Barriers and challenges mentioned by the participants of affording or paying for college application fees, college tuition and other expenses.	“So I was kind of afraid that my parents couldn’t have been able to pay for any of my tuition. So that was another thing that I felt that was another thing that also kept me stressed about the UCs. Because I didn’t know if we were we would be able to afford the tuition and stuff like that.” (Juliana)
9	Higher Education equity reflected by the policy reform	For this qualitative study that examines the influence of UC’s admission policy reform, higher education equity’s definition integrates the federal, state, and UC’s mission statements related to equity: equal opportunity of accessing higher education through removing barriers and addressing long-term disparities faced by underrepresented minority students. (University of California Board of Regents, 2020; University of California Office of the General Counsel, 2015; U.S. Department of Education, n.d.; The White House, n.d.).	Perceptions and observations of how equity is reflected by the policy reform, including mentions about removing barriers, opportunities, chances, fairness, etc.	“It gives a more even playing field I would say. So especially for minority and low-income students, barriers of not having the resources to study or getting higher score is removed. So there are more opportunities for them to apply and access. Higher Education.” (Ava)

## Data-driven Codes:

#	Code	Definition	Example
10	Stress of standardized tests	Stress, pressure, and/or anxiety mentioned relating to preparing/studying for and taking the SAT and other standardized tests.	“And I know for sure, if I were to take would have taken the SAT score, I would have been like on a high amount of stress and my mind would probably be cloudy too.” (Isaac)
11	Limited test preparation resources	Descriptions of limited test preparation resources or limited free access to the test preparation resources for the SAT and its alternative standardized tests.	“Um, I think one of the barriers is that we just didn’t get practice or there wasn’t any SAT practices at school. The most I would do is just a handout a packet that was optional to do. And that was it. So no, literally just there was a packet. Do if you want, or don’t if you don’t. And that was it. There was no preparation for the SAT. So I think that’s one of the resources that we lack, SAT preparation, or maybe SAT workshop.” (Chris)
12	Time constraints	Time needed to prepare for standardized tests, or time mentioned for conflicting or multiple priorities or commitments related to college planning and applications, including extracurriculars, higher-level courses, essay writing, home chores, part-time job, etc.	“I feel one of the barriers would be time and just taking time out for studying and for either focusing on actual schoolwork or focusing on studying for the test. Difficult to really balance it out.” (Ava)
13	Disbelief of the policy/rumor	Perceptions of UC Regent Policy 2103’s reform as a “rumor,” and/or temporary for fall 2021 applicants.	“Although in junior year, I did hear like, people will be like, Oh, guess what, I don’t have to submit my SAT. So when I heard that, I was like, Okay, it’s probably just for the seniors of 2020. When we go back to school in person, I will still have to submit it. So they got lucky. But so I thought it was just a temporary policy, right. It’s something because of COVID. Until the start of my senior year, I found out I also qualify for that policy. Most of the time, it just felt like a rumor, rather than an actual statement.” (Chris)
14	Student decision of applying to UCs	Students’ decision of applying to four-year or UC universities; changes or shifts from applying to community colleges to four-year or UC universities.	“But it also felt, I think, a lot of my classmates because I did go to a really dominantly Hispanic school. So I think for a lot of us, it was like, we’re going to be okay, we don’t have to worry about just another test. And, a lot of us got to apply to [four-year] universities.” (Juliana)

#	Code	Definition	Example
15	Teacher's role	Guidance, advisory, information and knowledge related to college planning and application process by teachers, such as school choice, major selection, essay writing, etc. Including guidance, advisory, information and knowledge of financial aid, grants, and scholarship applications.	"Yeah, and I did have had a teacher who came to UC Santa Cruz for biology. So it was kind of like a helping hand because she knew how the school worked and what they were looking for." (Juliana)
16	Peer's role	Guidance, advisory, information and knowledge related to college planning and application process by friends and peers of same class and those who are high school alumni, such as school choice, major selection, essay writing, etc. Including guidance, advisory, information and knowledge of financial aid, grants and scholarship applications.	"But once when my friends told me like, hey, you know, you don't have to think about your grades that much. You just have to be included in some clubs and stuff like that. And then you'll hopefully get into the clubs that you want just perfect your essays and stuff like that. And you'll get into the UC that you want." (Natalia)
17	Self-advocacy	Descriptions of taking actions oneself to navigate college planning and application process, including searching for information online, asking for help from counselors and teachers, etc.	"And then the rest I kind of figured out on my own. I figured out how to, like describe the activities that I was a part of, like, for the application. Because I was a little bit confused about that. So I like watch some videos on how you should present your clubs and your activities that you participated in. And I also had to figure out what I didn't know about the application waiver. So that information wasn't provided to me. So I had to figure out how to pay for it on my own." (Maria)
18	COVID-19 Pandemic and remote learning	Descriptions of barriers and challenges due to the COVI-19 pandemic and remote learning for college planning and application process.	"Um, I think one of the barriers is that we just didn't get practice or there wasn't any SAT practices at school. The most I would do is just a handout a packet that was optional to do. And that was it. So no, literally just there was a packet. Do if you want, or don't if you don't. And that was it. There was no preparation for the SAT. So I think that's one of the resources that we lack, SAT preparation, or maybe SAT workshop." (Chris)

## APPENDIX I

### The Third Cycle Codebook (Pattern Codes Involving Double Coding, with double-coding for interconnected themes)

Code #1	<b>Racism in Higher Education Admissions through Policies Requiring Standardized Tests</b>	
<b>Description/Definition</b>	Perceptions of the SAT and its alternative standardized tests as inaccurately, not necessarily, or not reflecting students' learning aptitude, college readiness, and/or college success; barriers experienced by URM students on preparing and taking the SAT and its alternative standardized tests; perceptions, experiences, and observations on how and whom requirement of the SAT and ACT benefits and harms students from different race and income backgrounds.	
<b>Example</b>	<p>“But during my whole school experience, at least from K to 12 I’ve always been getting decent grades. My high school GPA is 4.0, but I did like barely minimum in my SAT. It was 990 (out of 1600), so I don’t think it reflects on learning aptitude I think it just reflects on whether you can you know how to take a test and use strategies to take the test.” (Chris)</p>	<p>“I feel like it would create barriers because a lot of underrepresented minorities like myself, don’t have the money or the resources to get those study guides or workbooks. So, it would kind of affect our scores, it would kind of lower scores, because we don’t have the same access, as other people do.” (Natalia)</p>
Code #2	<b>Internalized Oppression of the Admissions Policies with Standardized Tests Requirement</b>	
<b>Description/Definition</b>	Perceptions on standardized tests, its requirement for college admissions, and four-year college application before UC Regent Policy 2103’s reform; fear, stress, confidence, and motivation level of applying and getting into a four-year university or UC schools and student decisions before UC Regent Policy 2103’s reform.	
<b>Example</b>	<p>“You know, this big test coming up, people stress, they feel thin, and they feel terrible because that that test can either make them or break them.” (Paz)</p>	<p>“I think the barrier would definitely be just not feeling like they are good enough or you see or are good enough to apply to a good school because of their tests score, so that can really influence student's self-esteem or confidence level.” (Juliana)</p>



<p><b>Description/Definition</b></p>	<p>Perceptions of UC Regent Policy 2103's reform as a "rumor," or temporary, trust in the admissions and its policy; confidence and motivation level of applying and getting into a four-year university or UC schools; students' decision of applying to four-year or UC universities; changes or shifts from applying to community colleges to four-year or UC universities.</p> <p>Perceptions of UC's comprehensive review after the policy reform, and experiences of college planning for the components of UC's comprehensive review, such as high school GPA, higher level courses such as APs, extracurriculars, individual experiences, etc.</p> <p>"You know, so just figuring out that we didn't have to take that test, and we have the possibilities of attending four-year universities without that number hanging around our heads. It just it was just like a sense of relief and, and a sense of excitement in the air. So I know, my school, a lot of students like actually applied to a four-year university for the first time.</p>
<p><b>Example</b></p>	<p>"Although in junior year, I did hear like, people will be like, Oh, guess what, I don't have to submit my SAT. So when I heard that, I was like, Okay, it's probably just for the seniors of 2020. When we go back to school in person, I will still have to submit it. So they got lucky. But so I thought it was just a temporary policy, right. It's something because of COVID. Until the start of my senior year, I found out I also qualify for that policy. Most of the time, it just felt like a rumor, rather than an actual statement.</p> <p>I felt like the college application was not so much about that number anymore. It was about it was about your entire academic side. And to get you got to tell more of a narrative of who you are as a student. So, I felt confident because I was not just a student that is taking an SAT, I was a student who was balancing a job, who was staying after school every day to do extracurriculars, who was at school in the morning to also get more extracurriculars and was doing college courses." (Erik)</p> <p>After the policy, I think the main aspect is confidence and not being afraid to apply to UC because of a score that you didn't do well on. I mean, my confidence, it would be more of the type of like, Oh, I'm not good enough for this. So I'm not gonna even try. But knowing about that policy is like, you know what, I think I have a chance I'm gonna go and do it." (Chris)</p>

---

<b>Description/Definition</b>	Support, or lack of support, from older generations of the household, include knowledge of college planning and application, especially for four-year universities, documents of immigration or citizenship status and tax return, and emotional support for a student to apply for four-year universities.
	Barriers and challenges mentioned by the participants of affording or paying for college application fees, college tuition and other expenses, excluding financial support for test preparation and taking, college application fees, tuition and other college expenses.
	Descriptions of taking actions oneself to navigate college planning and application process, including searching for information online, asking for help from counselors and teachers, etc.
<b>Example</b>	<p>“The largest barrier I faced during college planning and my application process was being first-gen. So I had no one to ask, Oh, how do I fill this out? Or, Oh, where do I put this? Or where do I put that? Mostly, and in terms of like financial aid, I had to explain to my parents Oh, it says I need this document. But then there are certain words that I can’t translate. So it would be difficult to really get through them with like, oh, I need this and this and this.” (Camila)</p>
	<p>“Yeah, I think I, I kind of did only because my parents were strict. Like I said, they, they were not supportive. So I couldn’t really bring my parents tax returns to the school to get help from my teachers with that.</p>
	<p>I think they were mostly scared. Like I went into this knowing that my parents were not going to support me financially, they were not going to support me in any way. And I knew it was because it was new, it was something that they’re scared of. But once I started, like, I would sit down with them, and I would show him the application, and they would freak out. They’re like, don’t ask me for money. And I’m like, I’m not asking you for money, I just want you to show you. And they didn’t know, financial aid covers, basically most of it.” (Erik)</p>

**Code #5**

**Key Influencers for URM Students to Access Four-year Higher Education**

---

**Description/Definition**

Guidance, advisory, information and knowledge related to college planning and application process by counselors, teachers, peers of same class and school alumni, including school choice, major selection, essay writing, financial aid, grants and scholarship applications, etc.

**Example**

“And for people that went to my high school because we had a great college counselor. She kept pushing it pushing it and pushing it. She would hunt you down, if he found out you didn’t do your best, and she kept pushing it to all the seniors to do your best, do your best to apply to the colleges you want. They also gave us a bunch of information. And then she had taught students about the information and then each senior homeroom class at one of those students in there to help them to.” (Paz)

“But once when my friends told me like, hey, you know, you don’t have to think about your grades that much. You just have to be included in some clubs and stuff like that. And then you’ll hopefully get into the clubs that you want just perfect your essays and stuff like that. And you’ll get into UC that you want.” (Natalia)

“Yeah, and I did have had a teacher who came to UC Santa Cruz for biology. So it was kind of like a helping hand because she knew how the school worked and what they were looking for.” (Juliana)

## APPENDIX J

### Latinx Freshman Applications, Admissions, and Enrollment, CA Residents (2020-2022)

UC Campus	Latinx Freshman Applications			Latinx Freshman Admissions			Latinx Freshman Enrollment		
	Fall 2020	Fall 2021	Fall 2022	Fall 2020	Fall 2021	Fall 2022	Fall 2020	Fall 2021	Fall 2022
UC Los Angeles	21833	28403	31704	2113	2171	2181	1162	1181	1279
UC Berkeley	13852	18180	22325	2983	2993	2977	1231	1206	1285
UC Irvine	26914	27713	30544	4137	5377	5152	1184	1883	1587
UC Santa Barbara	19989	21867	21853	5433	5919	6043	1069	1124	1199
UC San Diego	20383	23357	26572	5246	6449	7499	1079	1151	1913
UC Davis	16545	18496	19489	5688	6448	5657	1395	1549	1291
UC Santa Cruz	15627	16522	17427	7577	8309	6878	1152	1236	1070
UC Riverside	19925	20058	19504	10324	11212	11261	1955	1966	1903
UC Merced	12586	11741	10772	11346	11183	11213	1182	1290	1168
Overall	43178	48428	50417	28662	31220	31763	11409	12946	12695

*Note.* The data of this table is extracted and calculated from *Fall Enrollment at a Glance [Data Set]*, by University of California Information Center, 2022, copyright 2023 by The Regents of the University of California; *Table 2.1 University of California Freshman Applications by Campus and Race/Ethnicity Fall 2020, 2021, and 2022 [Data Set]*, by University of California Office of the President, 2022c, copyright 2023 by University of California Office of the President, Graduate, Undergraduate and Equity Affairs, Admissions; *Table 2.1 University of California Freshman Admissions by Campus and Race/Ethnicity Fall 2020, 2021, and 2022 [Data Set]*, by University of California Office of the President, 2022d, copyright 2023 by University of California Office of the President, Graduate, Undergraduate and Equity Affairs, Admissions.

### Black Freshman Applications, Admissions, and Enrollment, CA Residents (2020-2022)

UC Campus	Black Freshman Applications			Black Freshman Admissions			Black Freshman Enrollment		
	Fall 2020	Fall 2021	Fall 2022	Fall 2020	Fall 2021	Fall 2022	Fall 2020	Fall 2021	Fall 2022
UC Los Angeles	4150	5683	6099	544	592	671	298	345	422
UC Berkeley	2955	4035	4647	512	496	549	198	211	199
UC Irvine	3789	4366	4641	560	903	913	146	284	254
UC Santa Barbara	3211	3820	3825	816	874	958	158	162	218
UC San Diego	3730	4500	4960	765	870	905	179	183	235
UC Davis	2843	3430	3673	761	856	754	193	189	144
UC Santa Cruz	2287	2717	2800	1102	1186	989	203	211	147
UC Riverside	2772	3049	2938	1356	1428	1462	264	253	276
UC Merced	1484	1519	1481	1259	1468	1635	148	186	193
Overall	6900	8405	8640	3987	4608	4855	1787	2024	2088

*Note.* The data of this table is extracted and calculated from *Fall Enrollment at a Glance [Data Set]*, by University of California Information Center, 2022, copyright 2023 by The Regents of the University of California; *Table 2.1 University of California Freshman Applications by Campus and Race/Ethnicity Fall 2020, 2021, and 2022 [Data Set]*, by University of California Office of the President, 2022c, copyright 2023 by University of California Office of the President, Graduate, Undergraduate and Equity Affairs, Admissions; *Table 2.1 University of California Freshman Admissions by Campus and Race/Ethnicity Fall 2020, 2021, and 2022 [Data Set]*, by University of California Office of the President, 2022d, copyright 2023 by University of California Office of the President, Graduate, Undergraduate and Equity Affairs, Admissions.

**Indian American Freshman Applications, Admissions, and Enrollment, CA  
Residents (2020-2022)**

UC Campus	Indian Freshman Applications			Indian Freshman Admissions			Indian Freshman Enrollment		
	Fall 2020	Fall 2021	Fall 2022	Fall 2020	Fall 2021	Fall 2022	Fall 2020	Fall 2021	Fall 2022
UC Los Angeles	325	352	472	63	73	51	26	39	22
UC Berkeley	197	230	363	45	70	63	13	22	29
UC Irvine	272	247	348	52	151	267	12	45	96
UC Santa Barbara	326	321	450	112	73	145	27	9	51
UC San Diego	298	329	438	111	125	97	26	26	22
UC Davis	214	231	359	107	111	130	19	15	27
UC Santa Cruz	213	219	342	125	117	130	23	18	13
UC Riverside	124	95	141	76	49	90	-	7	7
UC Merced	67	62	82	65	62	87	9	3	6
Overall	543	573	761	363	380	516	155	184	273

*Note.* The data of this table is extracted and calculated from *Fall Enrollment at a Glance [Data Set]*, by University of California Information Center, 2022, copyright 2023 by The Regents of the University of California; *Table 2.1 University of California Freshman Applications by Campus and Race/Ethnicity Fall 2020, 2021, and 2022 [Data Set]*, by University of California Office of the President, 2022c, copyright 2023 by University of California Office of the President, Graduate, Undergraduate and Equity Affairs, Admissions; *Table 2.1 University of California Freshman Admissions by Campus and Race/Ethnicity Fall 2020, 2021, and 2022 [Data Set]*, by University of California Office of the President, 2022d, copyright 2023 by University of California Office of the President, Graduate, Undergraduate and Equity Affairs, Admissions.

## REFERENCES

- American School Counselor Association. (2019). *ASCA school counselor professional standards & competencies*. Alexandria, VA: Author.
- Antonovics, K., & Backes, B. (2014). The effect of banning affirmative action on college admissions policies and student quality. *Journal of Human Resources, 49*(2), 295-322.
- Apple, M. W. (1982). *Education and power*. Routledge.
- Apple, M. W. (2019). On doing critical policy analysis. *Educational Policy, 33*(1), 276–287. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904818807307>
- Atkinson, R. C., & Geiser, S. (2009). Reflections on a century of college admissions tests. *Educational Researcher, 38*(9), 665–676.
- Atkinson, R. C., & Pelfrey, P. A. (2004). Rethinking admissions: US public universities in the post-affirmative action age. *The University of California Office of the President: Presidential and Scientific Papers—Richard Atkinson*. <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2w60b2x4>
- Axner, M. (n.d.). *Section 3. Healing from the effects of internalized oppression*. Community Tool Box. <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/culture/cultural-competence/healing-from-internalized-oppression/main>
- Ball, S. J. (1991). *Politics and policy making in education*. Routledge.
- Ball, S. J. (1993). What is policy? Texts, trajectories, and toolboxes. *Discourse, 13*(2), 10-17.
- Ball, S. J. (1994). *Education reform: A critical and post-structural approach*. Open University Press.
- Ballotpedia. (n.d.-a). *California proposition 209, affirmative action initiative 1996*. [https://ballotpedia.org/California\\_Proposition\\_209,\\_Affirmative\\_Action\\_Initiative\\_\(1996\)](https://ballotpedia.org/California_Proposition_209,_Affirmative_Action_Initiative_(1996))
- Ballotpedia. (n.d.-b). *California proposition 16, repeal proposition 209 affirmative action amendment (2020)*. [https://ballotpedia.org/California\\_Proposition\\_16,\\_Repeal\\_Proposition\\_209\\_Affirmative\\_Action\\_Amendment\\_\(2020\)](https://ballotpedia.org/California_Proposition_16,_Repeal_Proposition_209_Affirmative_Action_Amendment_(2020))
- Baum, S., Ma, J., & Payea, K. (2013). Education pays, 2013: The benefits of higher education for individuals and society. *College Board*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED572537). <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED572537.pdf>

- Bell, D. A. (1995a). Serving two masters: Integration ideals and client interests in school desegregation litigation. In Crenshaw, K. W., Gotanda, N., Peller, G., & Thomas, K. (Eds.), *Critical race theory: The key writings that formed the movement* (pp. 5-19). The New Press.
- Bell, D. A. (1995b). Brown v. Board of Education and the interest convergence dilemma. In Crenshaw, K. W., Gotanda, N., Peller, G., & Thomas, K. (Eds.), *Critical race theory: The key writings that formed the movement* (pp. 20-28). The New Press.
- BigFuture. (n.d.). *College application checklist*. College Board.  
<https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/plan-for-college/your-college-application/get-organized/college-application-checklist>
- Bleemer, Z. (2020). Affirmative action, mismatch, and economic mobility after California's Proposition 209. *UC Berkeley Center for Studies in Higher Education*.  
[https://cshe.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/publications/rops.cshe.10.2020.bleemer.prop209.8.20.2020\\_2.pdf](https://cshe.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/publications/rops.cshe.10.2020.bleemer.prop209.8.20.2020_2.pdf)
- Bleemer, Z. (2021). Top percent policies and the return to postsecondary selectivity. *UC Berkeley Center for Studies in Higher Education*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED613769). <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED613769.pdf>
- Bowen, W. G., Chingos, M. M., & McPherson, M. S. (2009). *Crossing the finish line: Completing college at America's public universities*. Princeton University Press. *JSTOR*.  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt7rp39>
- Brown v. Board of Education, 347 U.S. 483, (1954).
- Brunner, B., & Rowen, B. (2022, June 13). Timeline of affirmative action milestones. *Infoplease*.  
<https://www.infoplease.com/history/us/timeline-of-affirmative-action-milestones#1995>
- California Proposition 16, Assemb. Const. Amend. 5 (2020)
- California Proposition 16, Repeal Proposition 209 Affirmative Action Amendment. (2020). *California*.
- Capizzi, L. M., Hofstetter, C. H., Mena, D. D., Duckor, B., & Hu, X. (2017). Promoting low-income students' college readiness, well-being, and success: A gear up counseling program study. *Journal of School Counseling, 15*(3). (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. EJ1144755). <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1144755>

- Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis. (2006). *The impact of peers on college preparation: A review of the literature*. University of Southern California, Rossier School of Education. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED499283). <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED499283.pdf>
- Civil Rights Act of 1964, Pub. L. No. 88-352, 78 Stat. 241. (1964). <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-78/pdf/STATUTE-78-Pg241.pdf>
- Clinedinst, M. (2019). *2019 state of college admission*. National Association for College Admission Counseling. [https://nacacnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/soca2019\\_all.pdf](https://nacacnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/soca2019_all.pdf)
- College application. (2022, June 22). *Wikipedia*. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/College\\_application](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/College_application)
- College transitions. (n.d.). *College planning for the high school student*. <https://www.collegetransitions.com/college-planning/>
- Cook, A. L., Pérusse, R., & Rojas, E. D. (2015). Promoting college access among latina/o English language learners: Implications for professional school counselors. *Journal of School Counseling, 13*(18), n18. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. EJ1076446). <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1076446.pdf>
- Crenshaw, K. W. (1995). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against. In Crenshaw, K. W., Gotanda, N., Peller, G., & Thomas, K. (Eds.), *Critical race theory: The key writings that formed the movement* (pp. 357-383). The New Press.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.). SAGE.
- David, E. J. R. (2013). *Internalized oppression: The psychology of marginalized groups* (1st ed.). Springer Publishing Company.
- Del Carmen Unda, M., & Lizárraga-Dueñas, L. (2021). The testing industrial complex: Texas and beyond. *Texas Education Review, 9*(2), 31-42. <http://dx.doi.org/10.26153/tsw/13911>
- Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2017). *Critical race theory: An introduction*. (3rd ed.). New York University Press. <https://doi.org/10.18574/nyu/9781479851393.001.0001>
- Department of Education Organization Act, Pub. L. No. 96-88, 93 Stat. 668 (1979).
- Diem, S., & Young, M. D. (2015). Considering critical turns in research on educational policy. *International Journal of Educational Management, 29*(7), 838-850.



- Douglass, J. A. (2019). Berkeley versus the SAT: A regent, a chancellor and a debate on the value of standardized testing in admissions. *Center for Studies in Higher Education*. <https://cshe.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/publications/rops.cshe.3.19.douglass.berkeley.vssat.2.3.2019.pdf>
- Douglass, J. A. (2020). The University of California versus the SAT: A brief history and contemporary critique. *Center for Studies in Higher Education*. [https://cshe.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/publications/rops.cshe.8.2020.douglass.ucvssat\\_briefhistory.6.25.2020\\_2.pdf](https://cshe.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/publications/rops.cshe.8.2020.douglass.ucvssat_briefhistory.6.25.2020_2.pdf)
- Ebaugh, H. R., & Curry, M. (2000). Fictive kin as social capital in new immigrant communities. *Sociological Perspectives*, 43(2), 189-209, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1389793>.
- Erismann, W., & Looney, S. (2007). Opening the door to the American dream: Increasing higher education access and success for immigrants. *Institute for Higher Education Policy*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED497030). <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED497030.pdf>
- Espenshade, T. J., & Chung, C. Y. (2011). Diversity outcomes of test-optional policies. In J. A. Soares (Ed.), *SAT wars: The case for test-optional college admissions* (pp. 177–200). Teachers College Press.
- Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974, 20 U.S. Code § 1701 (1974).
- Fuentes, R. (2019). English learners' appropriation of English language policy at a U.S. university. *International Multilingual Research Journal*, 14(3), 233–247. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19313152.2019.1684422>
- Fullinwider, R. (2018). *Affirmative action*. In E. N. Zalta (Ed.), *Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy* (summer 2018 edition). Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University. <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/affirmative-action/>
- Georgia Tech Undergraduate Admission. (n.d.). *Standardized tests*. <https://admission.gatech.edu/first-year/standardized-tests>
- Gibson, M.A., Gandara, P., & Koyama, J. P. (2004). The role of peers in the schooling of U.S. Mexican youth. In M.A. Gibson, P. Gandara, & J. P. Koyama (Eds.). *School connections: U.S. Mexican youth, peers, and school achievement* (pp. 1-17). Teachers College Press.
- González, N., Moll, L. C., & Amanti, C. (Eds.). (2005). *Funds of knowledge: Theorizing practices in households, communities, and classrooms*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.

- GovInfo. (n.d.). Higher Education Act of 1965 Public Law 89-329 H.R.5961, 117th Congress. <https://www.govinfo.gov/app/details/COMPS-765>
- Grant, K. L. (2020). Experiences of adolescents as they navigate the competitive college-going culture. *Journal of School Counseling, 18*(27). (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. EJ1281471). <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1281471.pdf>
- Guevara-Cruz, G. (2018). The importance of college-going culture for Latinos prior to high school. *Harvard Journal of Hispanic Policy, 30*, 63-72. <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A634429522/AONE?u=googlescholar&sid=googleScholar&xid=bc350530>
- Hallinan, M. T., & Williams, R. A. (1990). Students' characteristics and the peer-influence process. *Sociology of Education, 63*(2), 122-132.
- Higher Education Act of 1965, Pub. L. No. 89-329 H.R.5961, 117th Cong. (1965). <https://www.govinfo.gov/app/details/COMPS-765>
- Jackson, N., Fiester, H., & Workman, J. L. (2019). Understanding the experiences of provisionally admitted black male college students in the state of Georgia. *Georgia Journal of College Student Affairs, 35*(1). <https://doi.org/10.20429/gcpa.2019.350104>
- Jaschik, S. (2023). What if colleges lose at Supreme Court? *Insider Higher Ed*. <https://www.insidehighered.com/admissions/article/2023/02/06/colleges-start-prepare-losing-supreme-court-case>
- Johnson, G. S. (2017). School counselors supporting the career and college preparedness of students from poverty: Using the care model. *Journal of School Counseling, 15*(18). (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. EJ1162226). <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1162226.pdf>
- Johnson, H., Perez, C. A., & Mejia, M. C. (2021). *Immigrants in California*. Public Policy Institute of California. <https://www.ppic.org/wp-content/uploads/jtf-immigrants-in-california.pdf>
- Kaestle, C. F. (1983). *Pillars of the republic: Common schools and American society, 1780-1860* (Vol. 154). Macmillan.
- Kennedy, J. F. (1961, March 6). Executive order 10925—Establishing the president's committee on equal employment opportunity. *The American Presidency Project*. <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/executive-order-10925-establishing-the-presidents-committee-equal-employment-opportunity>

- Kim, D., & Nuñez, A. M. (2013). Diversity, situated social contexts, and college enrollment: Multilevel modeling to examine student, high school, and state influences. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 6(2), 84. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0033231.supp>
- King, K. A. (2009). A review of programs that promote higher education access for underrepresented students. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 2(1), 1. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0014327>
- Kobrin, J. L., Patterson, B. F., Shaw, E. J., Mattern, K. D., & Barbuti, S. M. (2008). Validity of the SAT® for predicting first-year college grade point average. Research Report No. 2008-5. *College Board*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED563202). <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED563202.pdf>
- Legislative Analyst's Office. (2021). *Financial aid award amounts*. <https://lao.ca.gov/Education/EdBudget/Details/540#:~:text=In%202021%2D22%2C%20the%20maximum,units%20on%20a%20semester%20calendar>
- National Association for College Admission Counseling. (2019). *State-by-State Student-to-Counselor Ratio Report: 10-Year Trends*. Retrieved from <https://www.nacacnet.org/state-by-state-student-to-counselor-ratio-report/>
- Matsuda, M. J., , III, C. R., Delgado, R., & Crenshaw, K. W. (1993). *Words that wound: Critical race theory, assaultive speech, and the first amendment*. Westview Press.
- McCoy, D. L., & Rodricks, D. J. (2015). Critical race theory in higher education: 20 years of theoretical and research innovations. *ASHE Higher Education Report Series*, 41(3). John Wiley & Sons. <https://doi.org/10.1002/aehe.20021>
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2018). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook*. SAGE.
- Militello, M., Carey, J., Dimmitt, C., Lee, V., & Schweid, J. (2009). Identifying exemplary school counseling practices in nationally recognized high schools. *Journal of School Counseling*, 7(13). (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. EJ886125). <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ886125.pdf>
- Moll, L. C.; Amanti, D.; Neff, & N. Gonzalez. (1992) Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect homes to classrooms. *Theory into Practice* 31(2): 132-141. *JSTOR*. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1476399>
- Moll, L. C. & Greenberg, J. (1990). Creating zones of possibilities: Combining social contexts for instruction. In L. C. Moll (Ed.). *Vygotsky and education* (pp. 319-348). Cambridge University Press.

- Morrill Act, 7 U.S. Code § 321 (1890).
- Naderifar, M., Goli, H., & Ghaljaie, F. (2017). Snowball sampling: A purposeful method of sampling in qualitative research. *Strides in Development of Medical Education, 14*(3). <http://dx.doi.org/10.5812/sdme.67670>
- National Archives. (2022, February 8). *15th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution: Voting rights (1870)*. <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/15th-amendment>
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2022a). Immediate college enrollment rate. *Condition of Education*. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cpa>
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2022b). Common core of data (CCD). *State Nonfiscal Public Elementary/Secondary Education Survey, 2020-21 v.1a*. <https://nces.ed.gov/CCD/ELSI/>
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2023). *Annual earnings by educational attainment. Condition of education*. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cba>
- Patton, L. D. (2016). Disrupting postsecondary prose: Toward a critical race theory of higher education. *Urban Education, 51*(3), 315–342. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085915602542>
- Patton, L. D., McEwen, M., Rendón, L., & Howard-Hamilton, M. F. (2007). Critical race perspectives on theory in student affairs. *New Directions for Student Services, 39*-53. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ss.256>
- Penn State Undergraduate Admissions. (n.d.). Penn State will be test-optional for summer/fall through 2023. *Penn State Undergraduate Admissions*. Retrieved April 28, 2023, from <https://admissions.psu.edu/coronavirus/frequently-asked-questions-faq/test-optional/>.
- Perez, W. (2015). *Americans by heart: Undocumented Latino students and the promise of higher education*. Teachers College Press.
- Pérusse, R., DeRonck, N., & Parzych, J. (2017). School counseling: Partnering with a school district to provide postsecondary opportunities for first-generation, low income, and students of color. *Psychology in the Schools, 54*(10), 1222–1228. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.22084>
- Popkewitz, T. S. (1997). A changing terrain of knowledge and power: A social epistemology of educational research. *Educational Researcher, 26*(9), 18-29.

- Postlewaite, B. A., & Frankland, J. A. (2021). How much do they know? An examination of student perceptions of university cutbacks. *Journal of Higher Education Theory and Practice*, 21(6). <https://doi.org/10.33423/jhetp.v21i6.4388>
- Potter, H. (2014, June 26). *What can we learn from states that ban affirmative action?* The Century Foundation. <https://tcf.org/content/commentary/what-can-we-learn-from-states-that-ban-affirmative-action/>
- Princeton Review. (2022). *2022 college hopes & worries survey report*. <https://www.princetonreview.com/college-rankings/college-hopes-worries>
- Proposition 209: Text of Proposed Law. (1996). California Secretary of State. <https://vigarchive.sos.ca.gov/1996/general/pamphlet/209text.htm>
- Regents of the University of California. (n.d.). *Local guarantee (ELC)*. <https://admission.universityofcalifornia.edu/admission-requirements/freshman-requirements/california-residents/local-guarantee-elc.html>
- Regents of University of California v. Bakke, 438 U.S. 265 (1978). <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/438/265/>
- Rezai-Rashti, G., & Lingard, B. (2021). Test-based accountability, standardized testing and minority/racialized students' perspectives in urban schools in Canada and Australia. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 42(5), 716-731. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2020.1843112>
- Ricks, J. R., & Warren, J. M. (2021). Experiences of successful first-generation college students with college access. *Journal of Educational Research & Practice*, 11(1), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.5590/JERAP.2021.11.1.01>
- Rios-Aguilar, C., Kiyama, J. M., Gravitt, M. & Moll, L.C. (2011). Funds of knowledge for the poor and forms of capital for the rich? A capital approach to examining funds of knowledge. *Theory and Research in Education*, 9(2),163-184. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1477878511409776>
- Rosner, J. (2011). The SAT: Quantifying the unfairness behind the bubbles. In J. A. Soares (Ed.), *SAT wars: The case for test-optional college admissions* (pp. 104–117). Teachers College Press.
- Sackett, C. R., Farmer, L. B., & Moran, K. B. (2018). A phenomenological inquiry of high school students' meaningful experiences with school counselors. *Journal of School Counseling*, 16(19). <http://www.jsc.montana.edu/articles/v16n19.pdf>
- Saldaña, J. (2021). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (3rd ed.). SAGE.

- Schmill, S. (2022). We are reinstating our SAT/ACT requirement for future admissions cycles. *MIT Admissions Blog*. <https://mitadmissions.org/blogs/entry/we-are-reinstating-our-sat-act-requirement-for-future-admissions-cycles/>
- Secretary of State. (2020). Assembly constitutional amendment No. 5: CHAPTER 23. *California Legislative Information*. [https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill\\_id=201920200ACA5](https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=201920200ACA5)
- Senate Constitutional Amendment No. 5, Cal. Legis. (2021)
- Smarter Balanced Study Group. (2021). *Report of the academic senate smarter balanced study group*. <https://regents.universityofcalifornia.edu/regmeet/nov21/b3attach2.pdf>
- Soares, J. A. (2011). *SAT wars: The case for test-optional college admissions*. Teachers College Press.
- Soares, J. A. (2012). For tests that are predictively powerful and without social prejudice. *Research & Practice in Assessment*, 7 (pp. 5–11). (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. EJ1062726). <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1062726.pdf>
- Springer, S. P., Reider, J., & Morgan, J. V. (2017). *Admission matters: What students and parents need to know about getting into college* (4th ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- Staff Writers. (2021, December 16). *A history of privilege in American higher education*. BestColleges. <https://www.bestcolleges.com/news/analysis/2020/07/17/history-privilege-higher-education/>
- Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. President and Fellows of Harvard College, 600 U.S. \_\_\_\_ (2023)
- Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. University of North Carolina, No. 21-707, 600U.S. \_\_\_\_ (2023).
- Tierney, W. G. & Colyar, J. E. (2005). *The role of peer groups in college preparation programs*. In W. G. Tierney, Z. B. Corwin, & J. E. Colyar (Eds.). *Preparing for college* (pp. 49-68). State University of New York Press.
- UCLA Higher Education Research Institute. (2022). *2022 CIRP freshman survey*. <https://ucla.app.box.com/v/TFS-instrument>
- UC Newsroom (2014, January 29). *How UC serves low-income students*. <https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/news/how-uc-serves-low-income-students>

- United States Census Bureau. (2021). *Current population survey tables for personal income. PINC-03. Educational attainment—people 25 years old and over, by total money earnings, work experience, age, race, Hispanic, origin, and sex.* <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/cps-pinc/pinc-03.2013.html>
- United States Census Bureau. (2022). *QuickFacts California.* <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/CA>
- University of California. (n.d.). *Applying at a freshman: Dates & deadlines.* <https://admission.universityofcalifornia.edu/how-to-apply/applying-as-a-freshman/#:~:text=You%20can%20start%20working%20on,submit%20it%20by%20November%2030.&text=UC%20Berkeley%20and%20UC%20Merced,for%20the%20winter%2Fspring%20term.>
- University of California Board of Regents. (2008). *Regents' item: Proposal to reform UC's freshman eligibility policy (action).* <https://regents.universityofcalifornia.edu/regmeet/july08/e5.pdf>
- University of California Board of Regents. (2010, September 16). *Regents policy 4400: Policy on University of California diversity statement.* <https://regents.universityofcalifornia.edu/governance/policies/4400.html>
- University of California Board of Regents. (2020). *Partial suspension of regents policy 2103.* <https://regents.universityofcalifornia.edu/minutes/2020/board5.21.pdf>
- University of California Board of Regents. (2022). *Regents policy 2102: Policy on Undergraduate Admissions.* <https://regents.universityofcalifornia.edu/governance/policies/2102.html>
- University of California Information Center. (2022a). *Fall enrollment at a glance [data set].* The University of California. <https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/infocenter/fall-enrollment-glance>
- University of California Information Center. (2022b). *First-generation college students.* <https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/about-us/information-center/first-generation-college-students>
- University of California Information Center. (2023, March 6). *Undergraduate admissions summary [data set].* <https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/about-us/information-center/admissions-residency-and-ethnicity>
- University of California, Los Angeles. (1958). *General catalogue: Fall and spring semesters, 1958-1959.* <https://registrar.ucla.edu/file/21f87144-2f4f-4e30-b8b0-b11e89ef52f9>

- University of California Office of the General Counsel. (2015). *Guidelines for addressing race and gender equity in academic programs in compliance with proposition 209*. <https://diversity.universityofcalifornia.edu/files/documents/prop-209-guidelines-ogc-full.pdf>
- University of California Office of the President. (2019). *Guidelines for implementation of university policy on undergraduate admissions*. <https://www.ucop.edu/enrollment-services/policies/guidelines-for-implementation-of-undergraduate-admissions--rev-7-2019.pdf>
- University of California Office of the President. (2020, May 21). *University of California board of regents unanimously approved changes to standardized testing requirement for undergraduates*. University of California. <https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/press-room/university-california-board-regents-approves-changes-standardized-testing-requirement>
- University of California Office of the President. (2021). *Discussion item: For meeting of May 12, 2021 eligibility in the local context*. University of California Board of Regents. <https://regents.universityofcalifornia.edu/regmeet/may21/a1.pdf>
- University of California Office of the President. (2022a). *Attachment 6—proposed rescission of regents policy 2101—policy on admissions, regents policy 2103—policy on undergraduate admissions requirements, regents policy 2104—policy on comprehensive review in undergraduate admissions, regents policy 2105—policy on undergraduate admissions by exception, regents policy 2108—resolution regarding individualized review and holistic evaluation in undergraduate admissions, and regents policy 2111—policy on academic verification*. <https://regents.universityofcalifornia.edu/regmeet/july22/a4attach6.pdf>
- University of California Office of the President. (2022b). *Action item for meeting of July 20, 2022: Amendment of regents policy 2110: Policy on augmented review in undergraduate admissions, amendment and consolidation of regents policy 2102: Policy on undergraduate admissions with regents policies on admission 2101, 2103, 2104, 2105, 2108, and 2111, and rescission of consolidated policies as separate policies*. <https://regents.universityofcalifornia.edu/regmeet/july22/a4.pdf>
- University of California Office of the President. (2022c). *Table 2.1 University of California freshman applications by campus and race/ethnicity fall 2020, 2021, and 2022 [data set]*. [https://www.ucop.edu/institutional-research-academic-planning/\\_files/factsheets/2022/table-2.1-california-freshman-applications-by-campus-and-race-ethnicity.pdf](https://www.ucop.edu/institutional-research-academic-planning/_files/factsheets/2022/table-2.1-california-freshman-applications-by-campus-and-race-ethnicity.pdf)



- University of California Office of the President. (2022d). *Table 2.1 University of California freshman admissions by campus and race/ethnicity fall 2020, 2021, and 2022* [data set]. [https://www.ucop.edu/institutional-research-academic-planning/\\_files/factsheets/2022/admission-table-2-1.pdf](https://www.ucop.edu/institutional-research-academic-planning/_files/factsheets/2022/admission-table-2-1.pdf)
- University of California Office of the President & Student Academic Services. (2002). *University of California eligibility in the local context program evaluation report*. <https://regents.universityofcalifornia.edu/regmeet/may02/304attach.pdf>
- University of Southern California Undergraduate Admission. (n.d.). *Apply: Test optional FAQ: USC's 2022 and 2023 test optional policy*. <https://admission.usc.edu/apply/test-optional-policy-faq/>
- U.S. Const. amend. XIV.
- U.S. Const. amend. XV.
- U.S. Department of Education. (n.d.). *Department of education equity action plan*. U.S. Department of Education. <https://www.ed.gov/equity>
- U.S. Department of Education. (2011). *Mission*. U.S. Department of Education. <https://www2.ed.gov/about/overview/mission/mission.html>
- Vélez-Ibáñez, C. G., & Greenberg, J. (1989). *Formation and transformation of funds of knowledge among U. S. Mexican households in the context of the borderlands*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association, Washington, DC.
- Vote No to SCA 5!* (n.d.). Change.org. <https://www.change.org/p/california-state-assembly-vote-no-to-sca-5>
- Vue, R., Haslerig, S. J., & Allen, W. R. (2017). Affirming race, diversity, and equity through black and latinx students' lived experiences. *American Educational Research Journal*, 54(5), 868–903. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831217708550>
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1934). Thinking and speech. In R. W. Rieber & A. S. Carton (Eds.), *The collected works of L. S. Vygotsky: Vol. 1. Problems of general psychology* (pp. 39-285). Springer. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/vygotsky/works/words/Thinking-and-Speech.pdf>
- White House. (n.d.). *Advancing equity and racial justice through the federal government*. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/equity/>

- Yin, O., Parikka, N., Ma, A., Kreniske, P., & Mellins, C. A. (2022). Persistent anxiety among high school students: Survey results from the second year of the COVID pandemic. *PLoS ONE*, *17*(9), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0275292>
- Yin, R. K. (2015). *Qualitative research from start to finish*. Guilford publications.
- Young, L. J. (2022). Librarians help pandemic-era students stay on track for college. *School Library Journal*. <https://www.slj.com/story/librarians-help-pandemic-era-students-stay-on-track-for-college>
- Young, M. D. (1999). Multifocal educational policy research: Toward a method for enhancing traditional educational policy studies. *American Educational Research Journal*, *36*, 677–714.
- Young, M. D. (2018). *Doing critical policy analysis in education research: An emerging paradigm*. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-93539-3\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-93539-3_5)
- Young, M. D., & Diem, S. (2014). Putting critical theoretical perspectives to work in educational policy. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *27*(9), 1063-1067.
- Young, M. D., & Diem, S. (Eds.) (2017). Introduction to critical policy analysis. In M. D. Young & S. Diem (Eds.), *Critical approaches to education policy analysis: Moving beyond tradition*. (pp. 1-13). Switzerland: Springer International Publishing.