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How Fair is Both the College Admissions and Ranking Systems

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Abstract

Thanks to the college bribery scandal the public got to see a glimpse at how truly unfair college admissions are and who are at an advantage. Thus the college admissions process and is questionable and unfair. This process is long and frustrating, however, most do not question just exactly how the colleges they apply to are fair in deciding who attends. The college ranking system is just as questionable as the college admission system. In this paper, the two main topics discussed would be the college ranking system and the college admissions process. The purpose of this paper is to question, how fair are the college admissions process and the college ranking system? And who benefits from these systems?

Keywords: college admissions, college ranking, fairness

How Fair is Both the College Admissions and Ranking Systems

When starting the college enrollment process, my school's guidance counselor told everyone to choose a college that is the best match for you. We were trusted in the sense of knowing what we wanted to study, what college we wanted to go to, and potentially the job we wanted to have in the future.

An important piece of information that was provided early on in the application process was to not pick a school in which its tuition was too expensive, although we could still attend even if it was too expensive because there were various ways to pay the tuition. Our counselor never throughout the process mentioned any ivy league colleges, as if those were forbidden to even consider those colleges an option. In an advising meeting they gave us a paper that stated the top or best colleges in the country, the only problem was mostly ivy league and private colleges were listed and few CUNY colleges appeared.

Just like how life is sometimes questionable and unfair, certain systems in our society are basically set up to fail. Two of these systems are both college admission and college ranking. The admission process is frustrating and long, however, most do not question just exactly how the colleges they apply to are fair in deciding who attends, the college bribery scandal was what made the public what happens behind closed doors.

The ranking system is also secretive, The rankings compare bachelor degree-granting universities across the U.S. on diverse factors of academic quality but no one for sure knows how direct they are. So how fair are these systems? Well, they're not really fair at all if you were to

consider all the possibilities in which a person can scam or bypass these systems if they have the money to do so.

If these were truly “fair” the college bribery scandal could have possibly never happened but this scheme just goes to show how universities have a bias towards wealthy people since all colleges want is people’s money. Because they favor more affluent students it leads to minorities and to students with a poor socioeconomic status and a disadvantage in the admissions process since.

This is the same for ranking systems because the higher rank a college has the more funding they receive and have more wealthy students applying/attending that specific school. If this scandal hadn’t become public no one would truly know exactly how corrupt the college admissions process is. So let me ask you this, Do you know anyone from your high school graduating class who got accepted into an Ivy League or “top” college?

The college bribery scandal was the Justice Departments’ largest-ever college admission prosecution. The scheme used bribes and private donations in order to help students cheat on college entrance exams or to appear as potential athletic recruits to get admitted into elite universities. The scheme codenamed Operation Varsity Blues, involved about 50 people and more than 30 parents.

The wealthy parents paid William Rick Singer, who was charged with money laundering conspiracy, four charges of racketeering conspiracy, conspiracy of defrauding the U.S. and obstruction of justice. Singer would then use the money to bribe SAT or ACT administrators in order to help the student cheat on the test, to bribe a college athletic coach, or manipulate a

student's profile in order to make them look as "athletic recruits". In the end, parents plead not guilty and a few other people plead guilty but the prosecution has not yet come to a verdict thus the investigation is still ongoing although the media has given the scandal less coverage than before.

Recently the college bribery scandal shed some light on how wealthy parents pay millions of dollars in order for their children to attend Ivy League or some of the country's top colleges, this scandal made people see the hidden side and question the fairness of college admissions. When the news of the scandal broke out people immediately directed their anger towards wealthy parents for allegedly using their wealth to cheat the system.

This proves how higher education has turned into a business, a corrupt business that drifted away from actually educating students which discriminates against minorities and creates economic inequality on campuses. Recent headlines and even admissions officer's statements have made it all the more clear that by hard or soft methods colleges accept and reject individuals because of this factor, a student's socioeconomic status can be the gateway to the world of higher education.

"suspicions are supported by academic research. Researchers have repeatedly found that wealthy students do enjoy significant advantages in the college admissions process"(Hess, 2019). It does not matter if students from medium-income families are intelligent and qualified to attend elite or IVY league universities instead these colleges prefer wealthy students as they are more willing to accept them than students from a lower socioeconomic status.

The college admission scandal gave the public a new side of what actually happens behind closed doors. Many students who come from wealthy families benefit from the wealth of their parents because it acts as a gateway to attending elite universities and who have far fewer obstacles compared to normal applicants.

The students that are well prepared for the college process are those who attend prep academies or well funded high schools because they will have the chance to meet with experienced and dedicated guidance counselors and have access to SAT or ACT preparation courses that could improve their scores this increases their chances of attending elite or high ranking universities. Foley, Park, and Yano (2019) stated,

“policies and practices that overtly favor the wealthy, from donor preferences to the incredible admissions scandal of recent months. These things are much, much more unfair than someone with a perfect SAT score—one of the thousands of similar applicants in the pool—getting turned down by Harvard and then being able to attend some other fantastic college”.

Colleges and universities seem to have a bias toward private donors, legacies; a student is more likely to be accepted into colleges or IVY league if one of their family members attended in the past, and wealthy people.

Every student has a dream university in which they would love to attend, however, most of the “dream” universities are elite schools such as Stanford, Harvard, Yale, etc but these schools accept more affluent students than those with a low socioeconomic status. Which causes most students to get rejected from their “dream” university which is a painful experience and can

be disappointing if the student has been dreaming about attending the school for months sometimes even years.

However, when life gives you lemons, make lemonade; the students who get rejected from their “dream” college, it’s important for them to have a plan B or C as being turned down by a dream school is a big blow but students must realize that they will be rejected many more times in life. Most students who get rejected are from the bottom 60% which are students who have a poor socioeconomic status, thus making the admissions system unfair if the administration is accepting students by their socioeconomic status.

This example of how students are rejected from their “dream” college could be considered pathos because it's appealing to emotion. The emotion that teenagers could feel upon being rejected is similar to that of a breakup since they feeling frustrated and as if their not good enough.

The recent college bribery scandal has given the public a glance at how college admissions differ for each student. And how wealthy parents pay millions of dollars in order to attend Ivy League or some of the county’s top colleges. Some parents go to the extent of disowning their children in order to get more financial aid so they don’t have to pay for college expenses.

Overall, the main beneficiaries are the wealthy, no matter what the most affluent people will always have the upper hand when it comes to college admissions because they can afford private tutors, private counselors to help with the admission process and afford to pay full tuition cost. When private donors donate money to universities, this money is used in order to help

low-income students and minorities to attend the school by using to create new programs that could help minorities attend the school and fund scholarships. In the end, college admission would never really truly be “fair” since there are numerous ways to cheat and bypass the system.

The college ranking system is just as questionable compared to the college admissions system. The rankings compare bachelor’s degree-granting universities across the U.S. on diverse factors of academic quality. Factors include graduation and retention rates, graduation rate performance, faculty compensation, financial resources, and SAT/ACT scores. The most infamous report about college rankings in *U.S. News & World Report* which impacts not only schools but students as well.

The *U.S. News & World Report* college ranking report is very influential in the colleges’ and universities’ reputation, they have a significant role in the early stages of the admission process. But how direct does the *U.S. News & World Report* qualifies colleges and universities because they don’t measure every little thing about the school yet they do measure the important things such as admission rates, graduation rates, tuition expenses, and faculty salaries.

These rankings don’t really paint the whole picture they just measure what they think students and parents are most interested in seeing. The higher the rank is for a specific school the more prestige they get as one of the top 10 colleges. “The rankings business primarily offers a school its branding opportunity, and while many measures might give an indication of an elusive definition of “quality,” a school’s brand is what ultimately determines its ranking” (Bristow, 2019).

These elite colleges obviously have a prestigious reputation that the school's quality or performance gets overshadowed by their reputation. Thus when colleges or universities get a higher ranking they get more funding, recognition, certified students attending, also a lot more donations from wealthy people. This goes to show how college is a business instead of an educational intuition, elite schools only really care about the money that they earn by accepting certain students.

The apple doesn't fall far from the tree since the college ranking system is just as unfair as the admission system but to colleges instead of the students themselves. The *U.S. News & World Report* does have some flaws as the overall criteria for ranking universities is a "rubric", meaning this is what all the school get measured on.

Stephen Burd, a senior analyst with the New America Foundation, a Washington think tank study showed "compelling evidence to suggest that many schools are engaged in an elaborate shell game: using Pell Grants to supplant institutional aid they would have otherwise provided to financially needy students, and then shifting those funds to help recruit wealthier students"(Karaim, R. 2015). This promotes a lot of economic inequality and diversity within the college.

It also makes the wealth gap and education relatively more connected, if a student graduates from a top college somewhere in the country they will most likely have more opportunities to find a job and higher pay whereas another student graduates from a community college or CUNY who will have a short career will probably have trouble finding a job and will be earning less than the one who graduated from a top or prestigious college. Colleges lure

students with higher test scores and grades to enroll, schools reward these students by offering them merit-based scholarships and don't offer any assistance to students who need aid.

The infamous *U.S. News & World Report* benefits more elite universities but they harm low income and minority students along the way. When colleges or universities get a higher ranking they get more funding, recognition, certified students attending, also a lot more donations from wealthy people. Thus colleges give more advantages to students who come from wealthy families an example would be rewarding these students with a merit-based scholarship as, thanks for attending our college.

“Critics say the ratings are arbitrary and favor private institutions over public ones. Similarly, he cited Harvard, which customarily places first in the ratings, but this year suddenly dropped to third. And he questioned why great public institutions like the University of Michigan or the University of California, Berkeley, could not crack U.S. News's top 20” (Applebome, 1997).

When the college ranking reports are published you automatically know that Ivy League schools such as Harvard, Yale, and Princeton are at the top of the list. Yet an interesting point is made by Ivy League students and the school presidents' as they are the ones who criticize it the most. Another point critics make is that these ranking systems favor more private academic institutions rather than public ones. Some administrators and students criticism this ranking system yet many people these rankings provide useful information for those who are in the admission process, but those same people also say the ranking does more harm than good. Ranking systems show how students from low financial means are clearly at a disadvantage.

As can be seen, the ranking system is unfair by giving preference to wealthy institutions. The rankings are just a business, the higher rank a university receives the more funding they get from both the government and private donors.

To summarize, both systems are unfair for different reasons. The college admissions give wealthy students an advantage by rewarding them with merit-based scholarships and a higher chance of acceptance if the student is of high socioeconomic status. Admission offices in elite universities favor more wealthy students who may not be qualified to attend than actually qualified students.

The rankings compare bachelor's degree-granting universities across the U.S. on diverse factors of academic quality. Obviously, the elite institution will place higher on the rankings because they have more academic resources and prestige. For example, an ivy league would most likely rank first place on the list because more wealthy people are from the top 1 percent compared to a CUNY whose students are mostly middle class, in other words, the bottom 60 percent in society.

All things considered, these systems will never be fair because there's a way in which people can bypass college admissions and universities can cheat their way up to a higher rank. Colleges instead of focusing on standardized test scores, grades, and GPA they should assess the students as a person because it'll give colleges' a chance to assess students beyond just numbers. Whereas college ranking should implement more factors that contribute to the overall rank such as student experience, student performance, and overall environment. However, they both have their flaws and possibly revolutionizing how they work can make them "fair".

My use of ethos in this essay would be in my introduction because it gives me credibility as the writer that personally I know how the college admissions and college rankings work. And by using reliable sources the reader can trust me that I did enough research also proves my knowledge on these topics. Logos would be the research I collected from my sources because I'm using those to prove my point of how unfair both systems are. The use of pathos would be the appeal of emotion, the feeling of frustration and sadness teenagers would feel if they get rejected by their dream college.

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