

## **Office of the President**

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

#### **DISCUSSION ITEM**

*For Meeting of May 12, 2021*

### **ELIGIBILITY IN THE LOCAL CONTEXT**

#### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This item provides an overview of the University of California's Eligibility in the Local Context (ELC) program. Since 2000, this program has allowed UC to offer admission to students from high schools throughout the state and to recognize outstanding academic performance relative to the educational context and opportunities available at individual high schools in California.

In its recent report regarding UC admissions, the California State Auditor noted that UC had discontinued the practice of actively reaching out to schools not participating in ELC, and as a consequence, was potentially denying students access to UC. This item describes how UC is addressing the audit recommendation, as well as the current context and scope of ELC school participation and admission outcomes as a result of the ELC program.

#### **BACKGROUND**

Concerned with the effects of Regents Policy Ensuring Equal Treatment Admissions (SP-1) and Proposition 209 on the makeup of the University of California undergraduate student body, in 1997 the Regents directed UC's Board of Admissions and Relations with Schools (BOARS) to implement race-neutral policies within the parameters of state law to admit and enroll students who represent the broad diversity of California.

The Eligibility in the Local Context (ELC) program rose out of this directive and offers guaranteed admission to California students ranked in the top nine percent of their respective high school class based on grades earned in the college preparatory courses required by UC and the California State University for freshman admission, commonly referred to as A-G. Also called the "local" path, ELC has allowed UC to offer admission to students from high schools throughout the state and to recognize outstanding performance relative to the educational context and opportunities available at each high school since 2000. The admission guarantee was originally offered to students in the top four percent of their high school class but was expanded to the top nine percent with the freshman class entering in fall 2012. ELC draws high-achieving students from every participating high school, thus supporting geographic diversity as well as opportunity for students throughout the state.

## **ELC Determination**

The University calculates a nine percent benchmark grade point average (GPA) for each participating California school using transcripts submitted by the school. The benchmark represents the GPA cutoff for the expected top nine percent of the school's graduating class. This GPA is calculated using grades in approved A-G courses taken by students in the 10th and 11th grades, weighted for all honors, Advanced Placement (AP), and International Baccalaureate (IB) courses. Most schools submit transcripts on a three-year cycle for resetting their school benchmark GPA.<sup>1</sup> Because each school's GPA range differs according to local conditions (e.g., class size, average student performance in courses, A-G course offerings), school benchmark GPAs range from above a 4.0 at some schools to near a 3.0 at others.

An applicant's ELC status is determined upon submission of the application for admission each fall. If the applicant completed at least 11 A-G courses prior to the senior year with a 3.0 UC GPA (weighted, with honors points limited to eight semesters) and meets or exceeds the benchmark GPA for their school, the applicant is deemed ELC and is notified upon submission of their application. The ELC status is also forwarded to UC campuses as part of the application record.

## **High School Participation to Date**

School participation in ELC is voluntary. Eligible schools must be located in California, be accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) or other regional accrediting agency, possess a College Board/ATP code, and maintain a UC-approved A-G course list offering the minimum 15 courses required for admission to UC. Participation in ELC also requires schools to obtain parent/guardian authorization<sup>2</sup> to provide the UC Office of the President with student-level data (i.e., transcripts) of their top students.

The majority of California public and private schools have participated since the program's inception. During the first ten years of ELC (with its first class in 2001), UC engaged in active outreach to increase school participation and surveyed non-participating schools to help increase participation. Among the reasons schools have provided for their non-participation include lack of school resources to collect and send student data, the assumption that their students would be competitive for admission without ELC, or having few students eligible for and applying to UC.

By 2012, the ELC program was well-established throughout the state, with over 1,400 schools participating. This represented nearly 64 percent of high schools with an A-G course list. UCOP resources were prioritized to implement the expansion of ELC from the top four percent to the top nine percent of students at each participating high school while continuing to support all new school participation requests.

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<sup>1</sup> The benchmark resetting process was suspended in 2020 due to challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic.

<sup>2</sup> Privacy laws protect student's personal data and transcripts. In order to legally release this information to UC to support the ELC program, schools must obtain authorization from the parents or legal guardian of students under age 18.

The program has continued to grow and nearly 1,600 public and private high schools, including 89 percent of public, comprehensive high schools currently participate in ELC. More than a third of the public high schools participating receive supplemental funding from the state based on their high enrollment of English language learner, low-income, and foster care students (Figure 1). These schools are recognized as LCFF+ (Local Control Funding Formula Plus) schools. Participating schools are distributed throughout the state and representative of rural, suburban, and urban schools.

**Figure 1. California High Schools Offering the Minimum 15 A-G Courses**

School Type	ELC		Non ELC		Total
	#	%	#	%	
High School	1,236	89%	147	11%	1,383
Alternative	38	38%	63	62%	101
Continuation	0	0%	97	100%	97
Opportunity	2	25%	6	75%	8
Juvenile Court	1	50%	1	50%	2
Other	21	24%	65	76%	86
Total	1,298	77%	379	23%	1,677

**California Public High Schools by LCFF+ Status**

LCFF+	ELC		Non ELC		Total
	#	%	#	%	
Yes	459	73%	169	27%	628
No	839	80%	210	20%	1,049
Total	1,298	77%	379	23%	1,677

**California Public High Schools by Area Type**

Area Type	ELC		Non ELC		Total
	#	%	#	%	
Rural	296	78%	85	22%	381
Suburban	509	79%	135	21%	644
Urban	493	76%	159	24%	652
Total	1,298	77%	379	23%	1,677

The 2020 California State Audit (CSA) on UC's undergraduate admission process recommended that UC resume its annual outreach to schools for ELC participation in order to reach more students attending high schools that serve a majority disadvantaged population. In response to the CSA's recommendation, the annual outreach campaign for ELC participation resumed in winter 2021, a practice that was discontinued in 2012 in order to prioritize UCOP resources to implement the expansion of ELC from the top four percent to the top nine percent of students. During this period of expansion, UCOP continued to support every school that requested to join the program. Even without active outreach, 20-30 schools were added each year.

With the current ELC program fully mature, UCOP is able to implement the CSA's recommendation without diverting resources elsewhere. In February 2021, UC contacted nearly 1,000 schools that are not currently participating in ELC, whether or not they were eligible to participate. For example, some may not maintain a UC-approved A-G course list offering the minimum 15 courses required for admission to UC, but may be moving toward that goal. The invitation to schools included information about how to determine eligibility and about the expectations of participating schools, as well as contact information for program administrators. An increase in the number of California schools that participate in ELC is welcomed by the University, as it will serve to expand access to the freshman admission guarantee to a potentially more diverse (socioeconomic, racial/ethnic, and geographic) population, and UC looks forward to helping schools currently ineligible for participation to attain readiness for future participation.

### **ELC PROGRAM OUTCOMES**

Each year, ELC represents about a third of California applicants to the University. For the most selective campuses like Berkeley and UCLA, the proportion of applicants who are ELC has been closer to 40 percent.

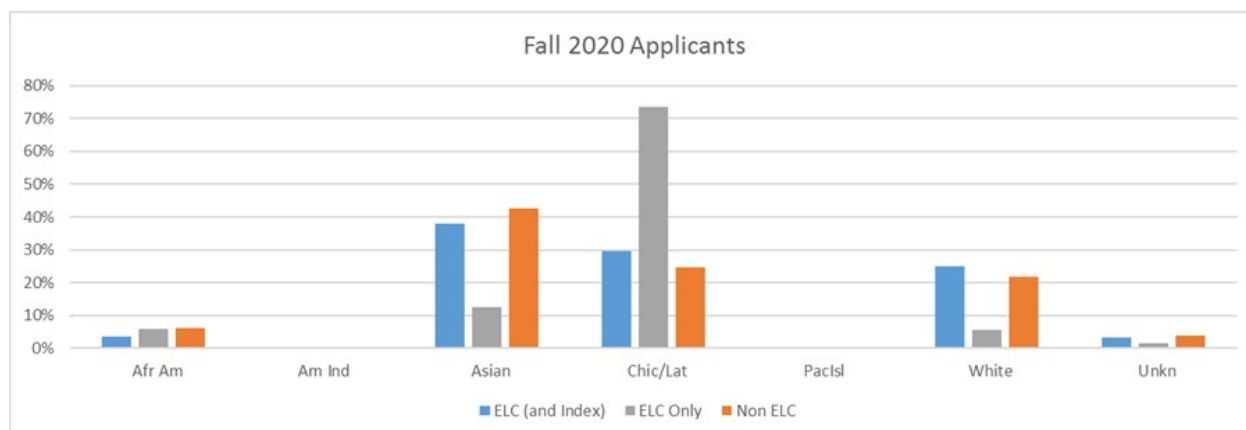
#### **Applicants**

Over 80 percent of applicants with ELC status also meet the statewide index, which is currently based on a combination of GPA and standardized test scores calibrated to identify the top nine percent of students in the state<sup>3</sup>. There is, however, a population of ELC-designated students who do not meet the statewide index and would otherwise be ineligible for the guarantee of admission; these students are categorized as ELC-only. While the racial/ethnic composition of applicants who meet both ELC and the statewide index closely mirrors the non-ELC applicant pool, the demographics of the ELC-only pool, while relatively small in number, are predominantly Chicano/Latino, as shown in Figure 2. As noted earlier, ELC is race neutral and does not target any particular racial or ethnic group of students; however, having representation of the top students from high schools throughout the state does serve to achieve greater diversity.

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<sup>3</sup> For fall 2021, UC could not consider standardized test scores as a factor in admissions; therefore, the admissions index could not be used to determine eligibility for the statewide guarantee. The Academic Senate is in the process of revising the statewide eligibility construct for fall 2022 admissions and beyond.

**Figure 2. UC Fall 2020 California Resident Freshman Applicants by ELC Status and Race/Ethnicity**



## Admits

About 90 percent of ELC applicants are admitted to at least one UC campus to which they applied (Figure 3). Some ELC applicants, however, employ application strategies that do not maximize their chance of being admitted. For example, they may apply only to one or two of the most selective campuses rather than applying broadly across the system. However, because these students are entitled to a guarantee of admission to the UC system based on ELC status and completion of the minimum 15 A-G courses, they have the additional opportunity to enroll via the referral process.

**Figure 3. California Resident Freshman ELC Applicants and Admits by Campus, Fall 2018, 2019, and 2020**

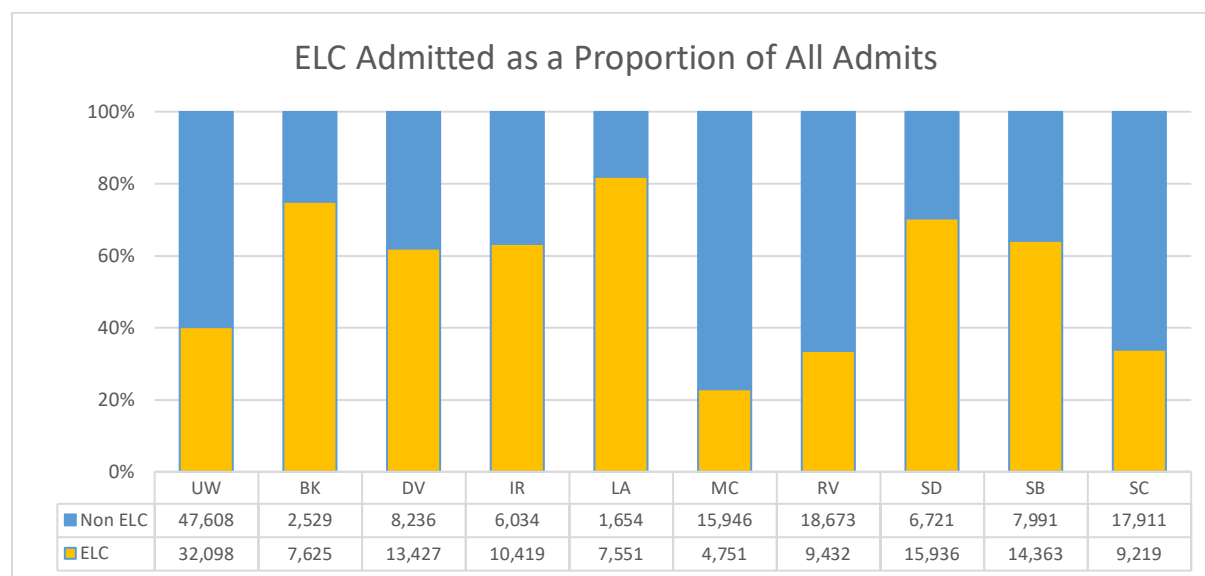
**CA Resident Freshman Applicant and Admit Counts - ELC**

	Fall 2018			Fall 2019			Fall 2020		
	Appls	Admits	Admit Rate	Appls	Admits	Admit Rate	Appls	Admits	Admit Rate
Universitywide	37,780	33,513	89%	37,117	32,707	88%	35,303	32,098	91%
Berkeley	21,587	6,877	32%	21,017	7,264	35%	20,176	7,625	38%
Davis	18,206	13,374	73%	18,244	13,448	74%	17,455	13,427	77%
Irvine	22,999	12,308	54%	23,445	9,474	40%	23,460	10,419	44%
Los Angeles	27,982	7,244	26%	27,402	6,934	25%	25,842	7,551	29%
Merced	4,796	4,748	99%	4,548	4,516	99%	4,794	4,751	99%
Riverside	10,202	8,485	83%	10,383	9,147	88%	10,309	9,432	91%
San Diego	23,378	13,315	57%	23,592	13,970	59%	22,551	15,936	71%
Santa Barbara	20,598	13,581	66%	21,178	13,108	62%	19,944	14,363	72%
Santa Cruz	10,245	7,667	75%	10,525	8,319	79%	10,203	9,219	90%

Source: UCOP, GUEA, UG Admissions, applyUC June files; fall 2020 are based on final applyUC and Datamart data

Since ELC is one of the comprehensive review factors<sup>4</sup> approved for selecting students, and ELC applicants represent the highest academically achieving students, they understandably represent the majority of the admitted class each year on most campuses (Figure 4). This is most evident at the campuses with the lowest rates of admission.

**Figure 4. ELC Admits as a Proportion of All Admits, by Campus, Fall 2020**

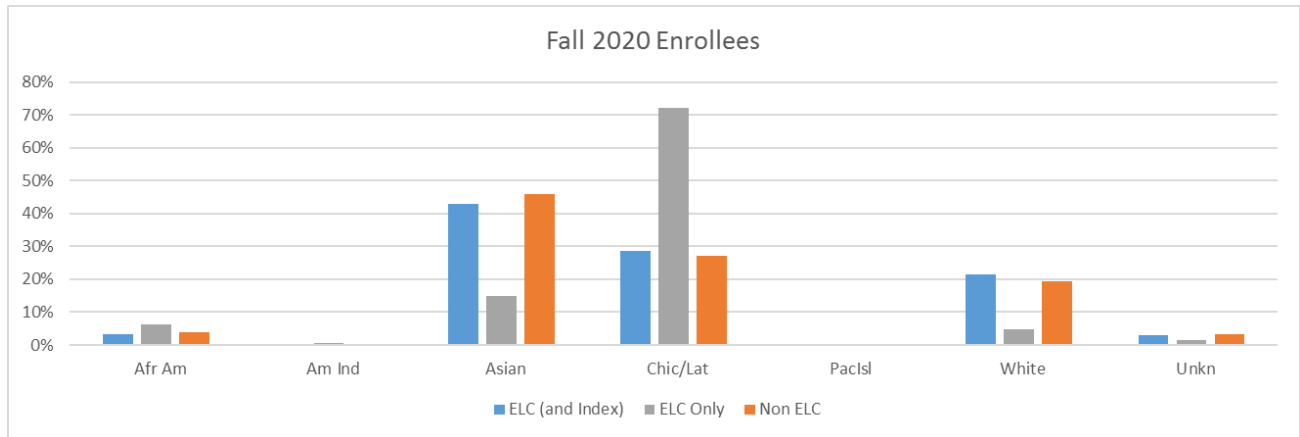


## Enrollment

ELC students enroll at a higher rate (58 percent) than non-ELC applicants (41 percent). The proportion of ELC from underrepresented groups that enroll at UC is also higher (39 percent) than the non-ELC population enrolling (34 percent). In particular, ELC-only students from underrepresented groups make up 78 percent of the total ELC-only enrollment.

<sup>4</sup> Regents Policy 2104: Policy on Comprehensive Review in Undergraduate Admissions (available at <https://regents.universityofcalifornia.edu/governance/policies/2104.html>) authorizes campuses to evaluate applicants for admission using multiple measures of achievement and promise while considering the context in which each student has demonstrated academic accomplishment. There are currently 13 factors that may be considered for freshman admission, including ELC status.

**Figure 5. UC Fall 2020 California Resident Freshman Enrollees by ELC Status and Race/Ethnicity**



## CONCLUSION

An overwhelming majority of eligible California high schools participate in ELC. Those that do not are predominantly schools that do not currently meet eligibility criteria or have chosen not to participate. The University is undertaking targeted outreach to these schools and working with them to achieve readiness for future participation; including support to address barriers to participation such as parent/guardian authorization and data transfer needs. Additional resources may be required on the high school side as well as for UC in order to truly move the needle in this area.

Expanded participation is critical because ELC continues to be an important tool for the University to increase and broaden the diversity of its undergraduate student body. With the recent elimination of standardized tests (SAT and ACT) within the undergraduate admissions process, GPA and ELC status may become even more important in campuses' comprehensive review processes as they will be two of the primary indicators by which applicants demonstrate their academic accomplishments within the context of their respective schools and signal their merit for an admission guarantee. Increasing the number of ELC-participating schools also potentially promises not only to increase the number of ELC applicants, admits, and enrollees but also to expand the breadth of California schools represented in UC's annual freshman class. Lastly, ELC's importance to the UC freshman admission process is unrivaled in a changed landscape without standardized tests where students are seeking assurance of being "UC material." While completion of the A-G requirements signals to California's high school students that they are preparing for UC admission, ELC confers a guarantee of admission to and sense of belonging at the University.

**KEY TO ACRONYMS**

AP	Advanced Placement
BOARS	Board of Admissions and Relations with Schools
CSA	California State Audit
ELC	Eligibility in the Local Context
GPA	Grade Point Average
IB	International Baccalaureate
LCFF+	Local Control Funding Formula Plus
URG	Underrepresented Group (e.g., African American, American Indian, Chicano/Latino, Pacific Islander)
WASC	Western Association of Schools and Colleges