History of College Admissions in the U.S.

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College admissions is highly complex and nuanced to the particular characteristics, missions, resources, and constraints of colleges and universities themselves.

Pre-Revolutionary War
9 Colonial colleges

Today
4,500 undergraduate colleges and universities
1.4 million faculty
Over 20 million students

• Almost exclusively reserved for the elite class, sons of wealthy merchants
• Students applied to local schools associated with their faith or community
• Admissions based on the completion of specific subjects
Higher Education as means for developing young men as future leaders in society

Higher education as a social status symbol

Students applied to local schools associated with their faith or community

Admissions criteria lax, remediation commonplace

Student’s ability to pay was paramount

Source: Thelin, 2011.
• **Morrill Act** - Significant expansion of higher ed through land-grant institutions

• “Open-door policy, tempered by common sense provisions to exclude those clearly unsuited or unready for higher education”

• Admissions – review of subjects completed and written or oral examinations, “flexibly graded”

• Remediation remained commonplace

• Higher education is diverse, but segregated by faith, ethnicity, race, and gender
1890 – 1920 Standardization

- Progressive reform in education — move to standardization and cohesion
- American Association of Universities (AAU)
- Requiring a high school diploma for admissions
- Common entrance exam – College Entrance Examination Board
- Advent of intelligence testing - identify academic promise within homogeneity
- Harvard – “New Plan” aimed to admit from good public schools – drops Greek & Latin
- Selective admissions – growing popularity in higher ed and standard measures

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Introduction of “character” as a selection criteria at the “Big Three”

Anti-Jewish, Anti-immigrant

Uniquely American “holistic evaluation” is formed

Harvard creates scholarship for needy students — need-based financial aid

Great Depression leads to the birth of the admissions profession (recruitment)

Bifurcation of colleges and universities — open-access, selective institutions
• Higher education moves from elite to massification
• GI – Bill
  • Strong interest to support returning veterans
  • More efficient and alternate forms of evaluating college readiness
  • Advent of for-profit institutions – diploma-mills
• National institutions and highly selective institutions
• Early admissions practices (Yale 1950s) and fall recruitment to feeder schools
1965-1990 Diversity

• **Increased access to higher education**
• **Pell Grants** — support loan income families, advent of student loans
• **Social movements and court hearings**
• **Brown vs the Board of Education; UC Regents vs Bakke; Title IX**
• **Access to high education is widened** — diversity reaches some of its highest levels
• **Analytics** — advent of search and increased marketing

1990 - 2013 Competition & Scrutiny

- Increasing number and increasing diversity of high school graduates
- Common Application
- Court Rulings and Public Referenda: Hopwood; Grutter v. Bollinger; Fisher I & II
- US News & World Report Rankings
- Test Optional Movement
- Internet and online applications — stealth applicant
- Recession

2014 – Beyond What’s Next

- Alternate measures of academic promise
- Increasing international student population
- Coalition Application
- Social media
- Committee-based evaluation
- Demographic shifts

SOURCE: ROMERO DA SILVA, 2017
Discussion

• What implications does the history of our profession have on the future of the profession?
• How can policies meant to favor certain populations and exclude others be used to increase access to higher education?
• What threats exist to higher education and how might colleges and universities react?