

# 19111 An Investigative Journalist on How Parents Buy College Admissions

March 12, 2019 – New Yorker.com

Dozens of wealthy American parents have been charged in the largest college-admissions scandal in recent memory. The parents were accused of attempting to insure their children's admission to selective colleges by paying university staff and sports coaches to misrepresent their children as athletes or college administrators to help falsify their children's scores on admissions tests. The schools involved included Yale, Stanford, U.C.L.A., and others.

According to Daniel Golden, author of a 2006 book on the subject, the rich and famous exploit the college-admissions system by benefitting from admissions preferences, like the preference for athletes, because their kids do so many elitist sports, like sailing, fencing or equestrian events. Normally, students from rich families benefit from athletic preference because they actually do sail, fence or ride horses, which is a preference in itself, because those sports are not offered at most inner-city high schools. But here the kids did not even engage in those activities but lied about it saying they did.

College admissions has evolved over the years. Initially, elite Ivy League schools like Harvard, mostly recruited from their own areas and simply preferred candidates from wealthy, well-established families. But then there were various efforts towards meritocracy, like standardized admissions tests, and today's system.

College legacy admissions, the system that allows automatic admission of the child of a former student, still exist but less than a few decades ago. So the rich and famous may be more desperate to get their kids in by any means necessary.

Also, other sources of income for universities have remained stable or declined. The percentage of small donations has declined, and there hasn't been much growth in federal funding for research and other sources of income for universities. So universities are actually more dependent on big gifts than ever before and thus, large donors have more control.

The other interesting thing is preference not just for the rich but for celebrities. Even if some celebrities are not as rich as someone from Goldman Sachs bank, having the child of a television personality in your university gives you a certain aura.

The perceived value of an Ivy League college degree goes beyond money, however. It has to do with social status and also affects financial gain in future years. If you look at the hallways of power in American society—the U.S. Senate, the Supreme Court etc—you will find many graduates of elite schools. This is not what most people think America is about, however.

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