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UC schools turning away record numbers

COMPETITION FIERCE FOR KIDS OF BABY BOOMERS SEEKING ADMISSION

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The University of California's top campuses this spring rejected a record number of applicants, reflecting a nationwide trend that made 2007 the most competitive year ever for students seeking slots at elite universities.

Admissions officers say the reason for the cutthroat competition is simple: There are more smart kids than available seats because of the bumper crop of "echo boomers," the children of baby boomers.

Nationwide, more than 3.2 million students will graduate from high school this June, the largest number since the 1970s, according to the National Center for Education Statistics.

UC-Berkeley and UCLA both rejected all but two out of 10 applicants this year. At Berkeley, six of 10 applicants with a 4.0 grade-point average or above were turned away. UC-Davis admitted 54.9 percent of its applicants, down from 63.7 percent last year.

The steep competition surprised thousands of applicants.

"I would have loved to go to Berkeley. ... I thought I might have a chance," said Clare Richardson, 17, of Palo Alto, who instead will head to highly selective New York University to study international relations.

The one bright spot was for black and Latino applicants, who saw their admission offers increase by at least 10 percent. Historically underrepresented students - blacks, American Indians and Latinos - make up nearly 23 percent of fall 2007 admissions, up from 21.7 percent for fall 2006.

At UCLA, 17.5 percent of underrepresented students of color were admitted, up from 15.2 percent last year.

This was the first year that UCLA used a so-called "holistic approach" for reviewing applications, which looks at a student's achievement in the context of his or her high school. The more individualized application review - modeled after an approach that Berkeley has been using for several years - is designed to value the high-achieving student from Compton as much as the one from Cupertino.

The increased competition was felt at other California schools.

Stanford University, faced with a record number of applicants, could have filled its incoming class four times over with applicants who achieved grade-point averages of 4.0 or greater, according to admissions director Richard H. Shaw.

Santa Clara University turned away 41 percent of its applicants, up from 34 percent last year. And the school's accepted students had stronger academic records than last year.

"Our wait list of 2,000 is the largest ever," said Sandra Hayes, vice provost for enrollment management at Santa Clara.

Admissions officers at all of the nation's top colleges say that applicants are facing the biggest squeeze since their grandparents climbed into telephone booths in the late 1950s.

At Ivy League schools, acceptance rates are the lowest in history. Harvard admitted only 9 percent of its record 22,955 applications. Princeton had the second-lowest acceptance rate at 9.6 percent.

Elite public schools like UCLA and UC-Berkeley also turned away thousands of qualified students.

UCLA accepted 20.6 percent of applicants, down from 22.2 percent last year. At Berkeley - where the class size grew slightly but the number of applications grew even more - 20.2 percent were accepted, down slightly from 20.7 percent in 2006.

More than one-third, or 38 percent, of UC's admitted freshmen are from families where neither parent has a four-year degree. About 35 percent come from low-income families, earning less than \$40,000 a year. Nearly a fifth come from high schools in the lowest 40 percent of California schools, as ranked by the Academic Performance Index score.

Overall, the academic quality of the incoming freshman continues to be outstanding, Susan Wilbur, UC's director of undergraduate admissions, said Thursday. The average accepted student has taken 23 yearlong college-prep classes, earned a 3.79 grade point average and scored 590 out of 800 points on both the verbal and math sections of the SAT.

UC-Berkeley's admitted class includes a student who danced with a ballet academy in Salzburg, Austria; several nationally ranked debaters; a member of the U.S. Junior Olympic Water Polo team; a nationally ranked chess player; and several members of a high school team that won first place in the American Computer Science League All-Star Contest.

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