

“Clout Goes to College”

The Influence of Power & Money on University of Illinois Admissions

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About the University of Illinois

- Flagship institution of higher education
- Public land grant school founded in 1867
- Employs more than 25,000 employees including 5,700 faculty
- Three campuses enrolling nearly 70,000 students
- Urbana-Champaign campus receives 22,000 applications annually for a freshman class of 7,000



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About the Story

- In late May 2009, the *Chicago Tribune* printed a series of articles examining admissions at the University of Illinois
- “Clout Goes to College” documented the *Tribune’s* investigation into the roles of prominent individuals and University officials in admissions
- According to the *Tribune*, applicants with sub-par academic records gained admission to the University based on support from state lawmakers, trustees, and others

Source: State of Illinois Admissions Review Commission Report of Findings and Recommendations



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3

Nature of Problem

- Undue Influence as a Systemic Problem in University Admissions
- Admission of Substandard Applicants Based on Clout
 - Persons with Knowledge of Clout Admissions
 - Volume of Substandard Clouted Admissions
- Denial of More Qualified Applicants
- Appearance of Impropriety

Source: State of Illinois Admissions Review Commission Report of Findings and Recommendations



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4 4

Admissions Review Scope

- Admissions review was specific to the Urbana-Champaign campus
- During 2005–2009, of the 112,000 applications received, approximately 800 applicants in total were on the “Category I” list
- Over the four-year period less than 50 students were ultimately admitted after post-denial review



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5

State of Illinois Admissions Review Commission

Abner Mikva, Chair, former federal appellate judge and director of the University of Chicago’s Mandel Legal Aid Clinic

Ricardo Estrada, Executive Director of Erie Neighborhood House

Bernard Judge, former editor and publisher of the Chicago Daily Law Bulletin

Doris Lowry, President of Aspen Pine Group, Inc.

Charles Scholz, former mayor of Quincy, Illinois and a private attorney

Zaldwaynaka Scott, partner with the law firm of Mayer Brown LLP

Maribeth Vander Weele, President of Vander Weele Group, LLC



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6

Commission Findings

State of Illinois
Admissions Review Commission
Report of Findings and Recommendations
August 6, 2009

[http://www2.illinois.gov/admissionsreview/
Documents/FinalReport.pdf](http://www2.illinois.gov/admissionsreview/Documents/FinalReport.pdf)



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7

Causes of Abuses & Responsible Parties

- Failures of Leadership
 - Board of Trustees
 - Individual Trustees
 - University President
 - UIUC Chancellor
 - Deans

Source: State of Illinois Admissions Review Commission Report of Findings and Recommendations



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8

Causes of Abuses & Responsible Parties (continued)

- Participation of Governmental Relations Office
- Absence of Clear Policies Specifically Governing Undue Influence in Admissions
- Issues Related to Trustee Selection and Training

Source: State of Illinois Admissions Review Commission Report of Findings and Recommendations



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9

Recommended Reforms

- Review of University Leadership: Trustees and Administration
- Enhancing Ethical Governance: Establish Board Ethics Committee
- Enforcement: Recommendation to General Assembly to create higher education Inspector General

Source: State of Illinois Admissions Review Commission Report of Findings and Recommendations



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10

Recommended Reforms

(continued)

- Admissions Policy
 - Elimination of “Category I”
 - “Firewall” Around Admissions
 - Re-evaluation of Appeals Processes
 - Process for Handling Third-Party Inquiries
 - Best Practices Review
 - Diversity Among Admissions Officers

Source: State of Illinois Admissions Review Commission Report of Findings and Recommendations



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11

U of I Actions

- Eliminated “Category I”
- Appointed interim President and campus chancellor
- Governor appointed six new members to Board of Trustees
- Created Board of Trustees Ethics and Governance Committee
- Created an admissions *Ethical Code of Practice*
- Posted admissions criteria and evaluation factors

Source: <http://provost.illinois.edu/admissions/index.html>



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12

U of I Actions (continued)

- Published and implemented admissions appeals process
- “Firewall” placed around Admissions function to prohibit improper influence with potential breaches
- Potential breaches reported and documented in online database for review by Senate Admissions Committee
- Best practice reviews conducted and processes reevaluated regularly

Source: <http://provost.illinois.edu/admissions/index.html>



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13

Suggested Discussion Questions

- As an administrator, admissions director, development officer, public relations/communications, what do you do and why?
- What should be the role of elected and/or appointed officials in admissions?
- Are there different considerations if the institution is private?
- Why did it take a newspaper investigation?
- How could this have been prevented?
- What role does the ethics/compliance officer play?
- Would a state inspector general for higher education make a difference?



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14
14

For Further Information

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15
15

Thank you



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16
16