

Eliminating Standardized Testing to Increase Access:

Southeast Asian Americans
and the University of
California System

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The University of California (UC) system is currently debating whether to remove consideration of SAT scores in the undergraduate admissions process. A coalition of students, advocacy groups, and a largely Black and Latinx California school district have filed a lawsuit claiming that the UC system’s consideration of the SAT in the admissions process is biased against mainly Black and Latinx students and that it illegally discriminates against applicants on the basis of their race, wealth, and disability¹. There is an assumption that dropping the SAT requirement would increase college access, particularly for under-represented minority students. One way to gain a sense of how removing test score requirements affects admissions outcomes is to look back at the last time the UC system dropped a test score requirement.

Beginning with the undergraduate class entering the UC in fall 2012, applicants were no longer required to submit SAT II, or SAT subject test scores. Leading up to this change, some Asian American community leaders lodged concerns against dropping this SAT II test score requirement, which they believed would decrease the number of Asian American students admitted to the university². However, as this policy brief demonstrates, there were substantial increases in the number of applicants and admitted students, despite decreases in admission rates, to the UC for all racial and ethnic groups,

¹Hartocollis, A. (2019, December 2019). University of California Is sued over use of SAT and ACT in admissions. New York Times, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/10/us/sat-act-uc-lawsuit.html>

²Poon, O. A. (2009a). AAPIs in the College Access Debate: A Case of Generational and Communication Gaps in the AAPI Education Agenda. AAPI Nexus Journal: Policy, Practice, and Community, 7(2), 83–106. https://doi.org/10.36650/nexus7.2_83-106_poon

Poon, O. A. (2009b). Haunted by Negative Action: Asian Americans, Admissions, and Race in the “Color-Blind Era”. Asian American Policy Review, 18(July 2007), 81–90.



following the elimination of the SAT II requirement. These trends held true for Asian Americans and Southeast Asian Americans (SEAA), which include combined group of Hmong, Laotian, Cambodian, and Vietnamese ethnic groups³

Immediate Increased Applications and Admitted Students

After dropping the SAT II requirement, the UC system received an immediate increase in applications and admitted students in the first year of the new policy across all racial categories, including the Southeast Asian American (SEAA) group, the first year of the new policy. Table 1 shows the percentage increases in the number of applications

Table 1: Percent Changes in Domestic+ Applications and Admitted Students in UC System (2012-2013)

Race (Domestic*)	# of Applications (% change)	# of Admitted Students (% change)
ALL STUDENTS	+19.0%	+10.2%
- All Domestic Students	+14.9%	+6.5%
— African American/Black	+24.5%	+12.6%
— American Indian/Alaska Native	+17.3%	+11.7%
— Asian	+13.5%	+7.2%
—— Southeast Asian	+14.3%	+9.2%
— Hispanic/Latinx	+19.0%	+8.3%
— Native Hawaiian & PI	+38.3%	+23.7%
— Southwest Asian/North African	+26.2%	+18.8%
— White	+8.7%	+0.8%

+ Domestic refers to anyone who were U.S. citizens, permanent residents, refugees, amnesty recipients, approved petitioners, or political/religious asylees. It does NOT indicate California residency.

³ Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC) defines Southeast Asian American (SEAA) as a political identity of people from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos and we will be using this definition.

of domestic⁴ students, as well as the number of admitted domestic students. The spike in applications for the 2012-2013 academic year percentage increased likely because of the elimination of the SAT II requirement. The increase in applications was also accompanied by a 6.5% increase in the number of domestic admitted students.

Focusing on Southeast Asian Americans, Table 2 shows the percentage change in their applications and admitted students by UC campus. Santa Cruz, Irvine, Riverside, Santa Barbara, and Berkeley all received large increases in applications. All but three campuses (Los Angeles, Berkeley, and Merced) increased their admission offers to Southeast Asian American students.

Table 2: Percent Changes in Applications and Admitted Domestic Southeast Asian at UC Schools (2012-2013)⁵

UC School	# of Applications (% change)	# of Admitted Students (% change)
Santa Cruz	+18.6%	+15.5%
Irvine	+14.3%	+9.2%
Los Angeles	+12.3%	-10.6%
Riverside	+11.8%	+10.2%
Santa Barbara	+10.5%	+5.0%
Berkeley	+9.8%	-2.4%
San Diego	+8.3%	+3.4%
Davis	+2.8%	+0.9%
Merced	-4.2%	-5.3%

⁴ Domestic refers to anyone who were U.S. citizens, permanent residents, refugees, amnesty recipients, approved petitioners, or political/religious asylees. It does NOT indicate California residency

⁵ The table only represents the percentage changes that occurred for the 2012-2013 academic year.

Increased Applications and Decreased Admission Rates

Although UC applications and admitted students increased in 2012, the admit rates for all students declined from 2012-2015. The admit rate is the percentage of students who were admitted the application pool (Admit rate=Admitted Students/Applications). Figure 1 shows that the admit rate decreased for all racial groups between 2011-2015. Figure 2 shows that admit rates for the larger Asian American ethnic groups decreased between 2011-2015.

Figure 1: UC System Domestic Admit Rates by Race (2011-2015)

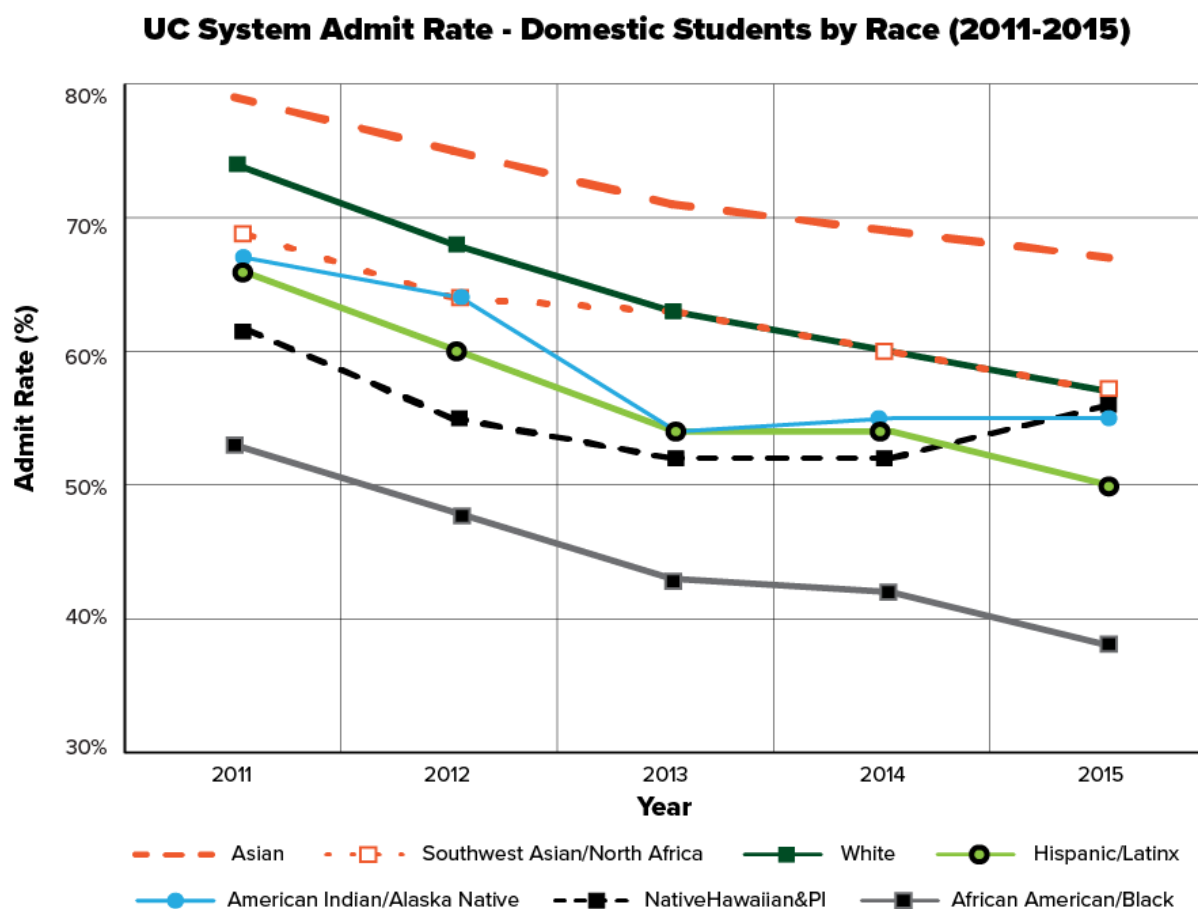
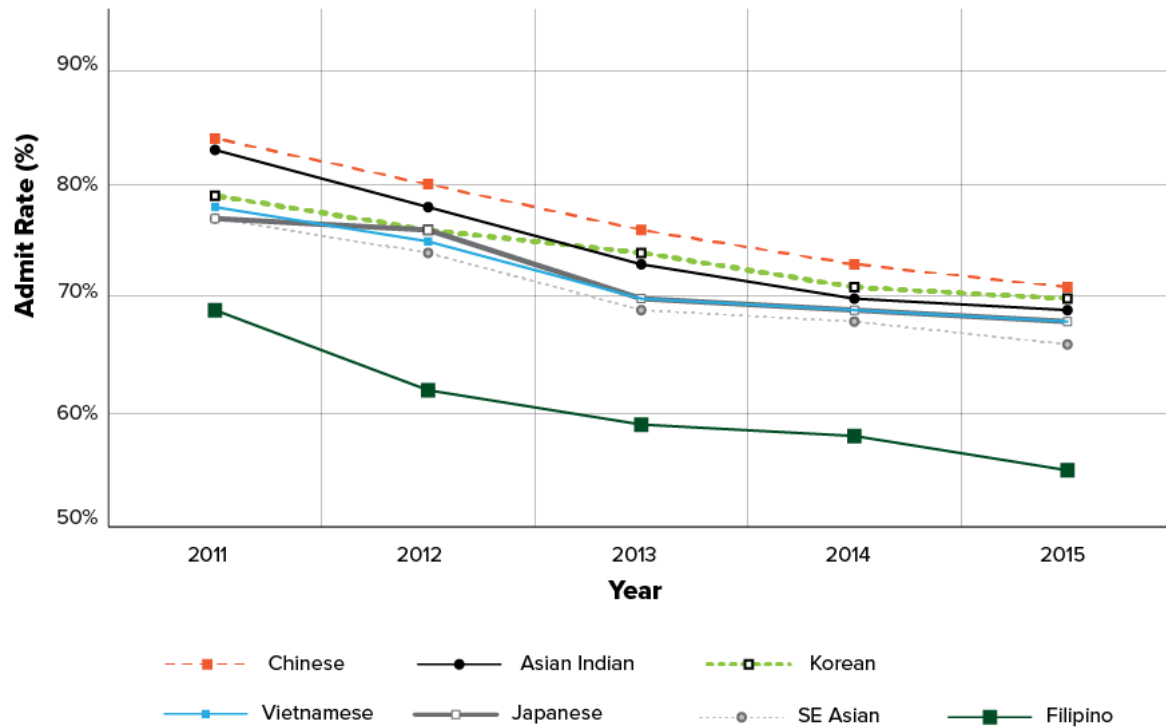


Figure 2: Domestic Admit Rates to UC System by Selected Asian Ethnic Groups (2011-2015)

Domestic Admit Rates to UC System by Selected Asian Ethnic Groups (2011-2015)



The admit rate decreases can be attributed to the fact that though the number of admitted students increased in 2012, the number of admitted students for the UC system remained constant after 2012. Table 3 shows the applications, admitted students, and admit rate calculated for all domestic students, domestic Asian students, and domestic Southeast Asian students. The number of applications has been increasing, but between 2012-2015, the number of admitted students has generally been stable at about 75,000. Due to the increasing number of applications and no change in the number of admitted students, the admit rate continued to decline.

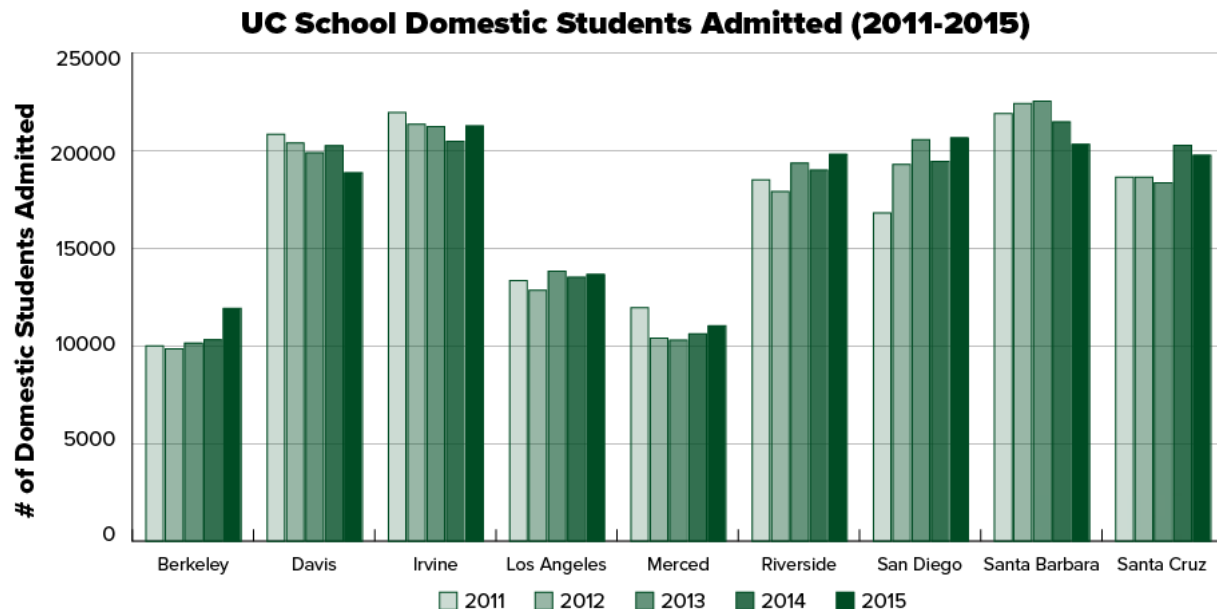
Table 3: UC System Domestic⁺ Applications, Admitted Students, & Admit Rate (2011-2015)

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Domestic - Applications	97,779	112,352	121,119	125,880	133,346
Domestic - Admitted	70,513	75,066	74,941	75,671	76,102
<i>Domestic - Admit Rate</i>	<i>72%</i>	<i>67%</i>	<i>62%</i>	<i>60%</i>	<i>57%</i>
Domestic Asian - Applications	31,817	36,104	37,469	39,702	41,269
Domestic Asian Admitted	25,262	27,091	26,688	27,410	27,722
<i>Domestic Asian – Admit Rate</i>	<i>79%</i>	<i>75%</i>	<i>71%</i>	<i>69%</i>	<i>67%</i>
Domestic Southeast Asian - Applications	4,960	5,648	5,887	6,176	6,330
Domestic Southeast Asian - Admitted	3,823	4,178	4,035	4,185	4,206
<i>Domestic Southeast Asian - Admit Rate</i>	<i>77.1%</i>	<i>74.0%</i>	<i>68.5%</i>	<i>67.8%</i>	<i>66.4%</i>

⁺ Domestic applications refers to anyone who were U.S. citizens, permanent residents, refugees, amnesty recipients, approved petitioners, or political/religious asylees.

Figure 3 shows the number of domestic students admitted to each UC system school. At some schools, like UC San Diego, UC Riverside, and UC Santa Cruz, offers of admission increased; however, many schools kept their admission offers consistent, or actually decreased the number of domestic students being offered admission. A closer examination is needed in understanding the individual strategies that universities were using in order to admit an increasing class. One possibility was that schools like Davis and Santa Barbara were increasing admission offers to international and out-of-state students while decreasing admission offers to domestic students in order to increase the potential for higher tuition paying students.

Figure 3: UC School Domestic Students Admitted (2011-2015)



External Action Will Prompt More Significant Change

While dropping the SAT II requirement led to an increase in the number of applications and admitted students across race and ethnicity, the most dramatic change in admissions resulted after the California state government demanded that the UC decrease admissions of non-resident students, especially for international students, and tied university funding to the increase in admitted in-state students⁶. After this 2015 legislative act, there was an increase in the number of admitted and enrolled students from California, starting with the class entering in 2016. Table 4 shows that the number of Asian Americans, including Southeast Asian Americans (SEAA), were admitted at higher

⁶ <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/13/us/after-outcry-university-of-california-increases-in-state-admission-offers.html>

Table 4: Percentage Change in UC System Admitted Students and Enrolled Students (2016-2017)

Race	# of Admitted Students (% Change)	# of Enrolled Students (% Change)
African American/Black	+29.4%	+31.4%
American Indian/Alaska Native	+95.3%	+107.8%
Asian	+14.9%	+15.1%
— Southeast Asian	+13.9%	+14.4%
Hispanic/Latinx	+29.5%	+28.7%
Native Hawaiian & PI	+202.0%	+155.8%
Southwest Asian/North African	+110.6%	+112.5%
White	+62.9%	+67.4%

rates, 14.9% and 13.9% respectively, and the numbers of enrolled students increased by 15.1% and 14.4%, respectively. While the population increased overall and for Asian Americans, the differences shown by the external action shows that it was more likely due to the legislative action than mere population differences.

Table 5 gives a closer look at what happened in undergraduate admissions

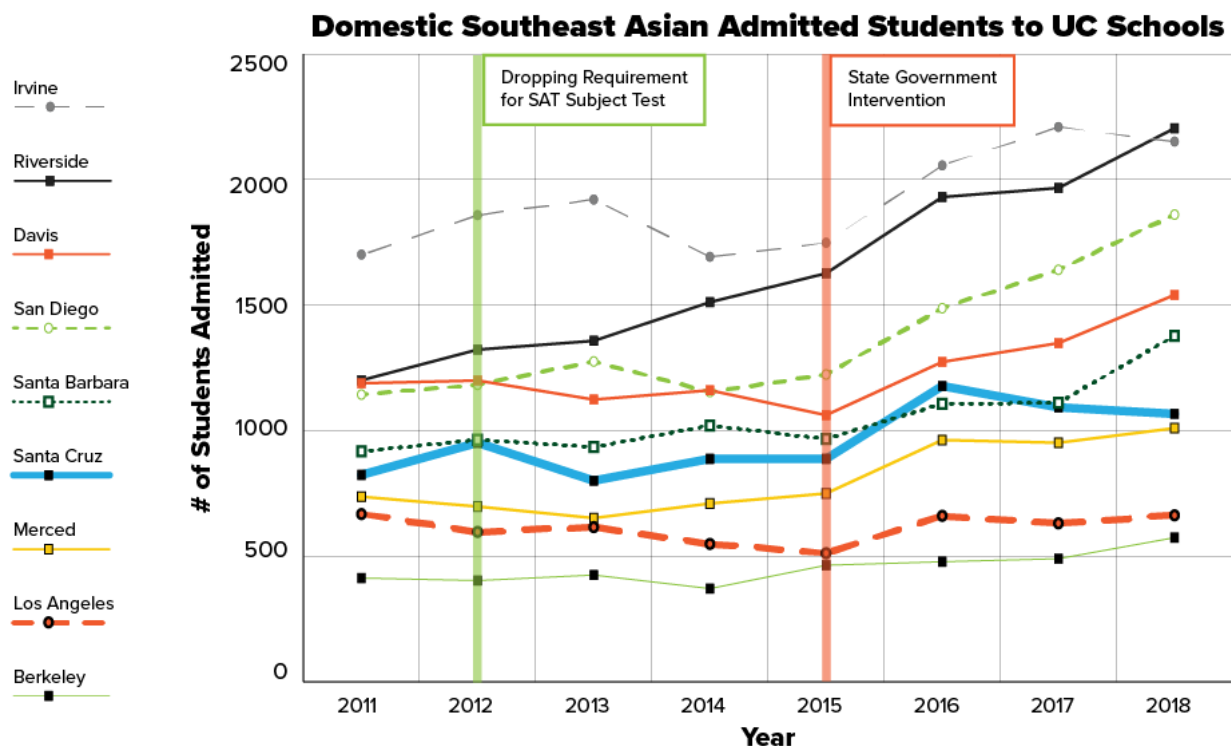
Table 5: Percentage Change of Admitted Students in Domestic Southeast Asian (2016)

UC School	# of Admitted Students (% Change)
Berkeley	+3.0%
Davis	+20.0%
Irvine	+17.6%
Los Angeles	+29.1%
Merced	+28.4%
Riverside	+18.7%
San Diego	+21.6%
Santa Barbara	+14.5%
Santa Cruz	+32.7%

after the 2015 legislation at each individual UC school in admitting Southeast Asian Americans in 2016. Every school except for Berkeley, which had previously experienced a 25.1% increase in the number of domestic Southeast Asian students for the 2015-2016 academic year, saw increases in admitted students by 14.5% - 32.7%.

The best sign that the 2015 state government action had a more lasting effect on Southeast Asian Americans is shown in Figure 4. In 2012, the number of admitted students did not increase at every UC campus and showed fluctuations in Southeast Asian admissions, such as at Santa Cruz, Irvine, and Los Angeles. After the 2015 state policy change that tied the number of California students admitted to funding allocations,

Figure 4: Domestic Southeast Asian Admitted Students to UC Schools



the UC has seen a more sustained growth of Southeast Asian American students admitted at all UC campuses.

Southeast Asian Americans are More Likely to Enroll in the UC

Southeast Asian Americans were the most likely to enroll to the UC system when given an admission offer with an average yield rate of 61%. Figure 5 shows the yield rates for the largest Asian ethnic groups to the UC system. Oftentimes, enrollment statistics are confused with admission numbers. It is important to remember that student differences in the likelihood of applying, rates of admission, and patterns in enrollment decisions result in variations in enrollment demographics.

Figure 5: Yield Rate of Domestic Asian Ethnic Groups to UC System (2011-2018)

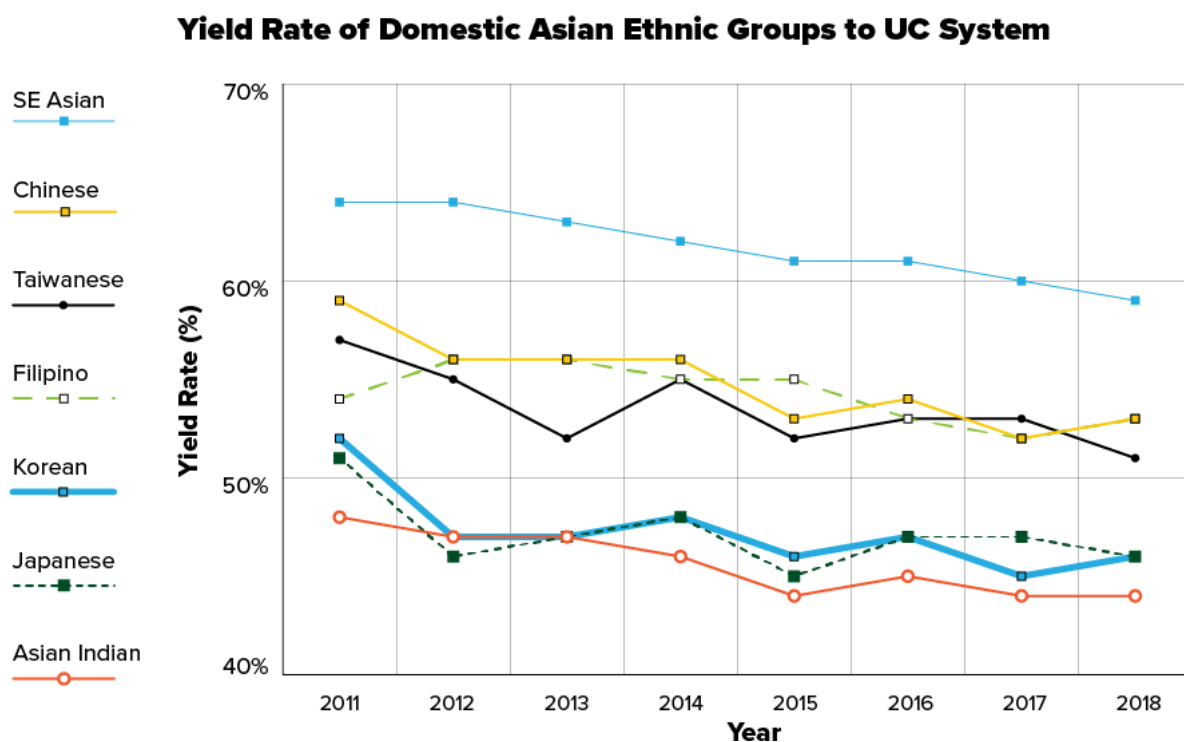
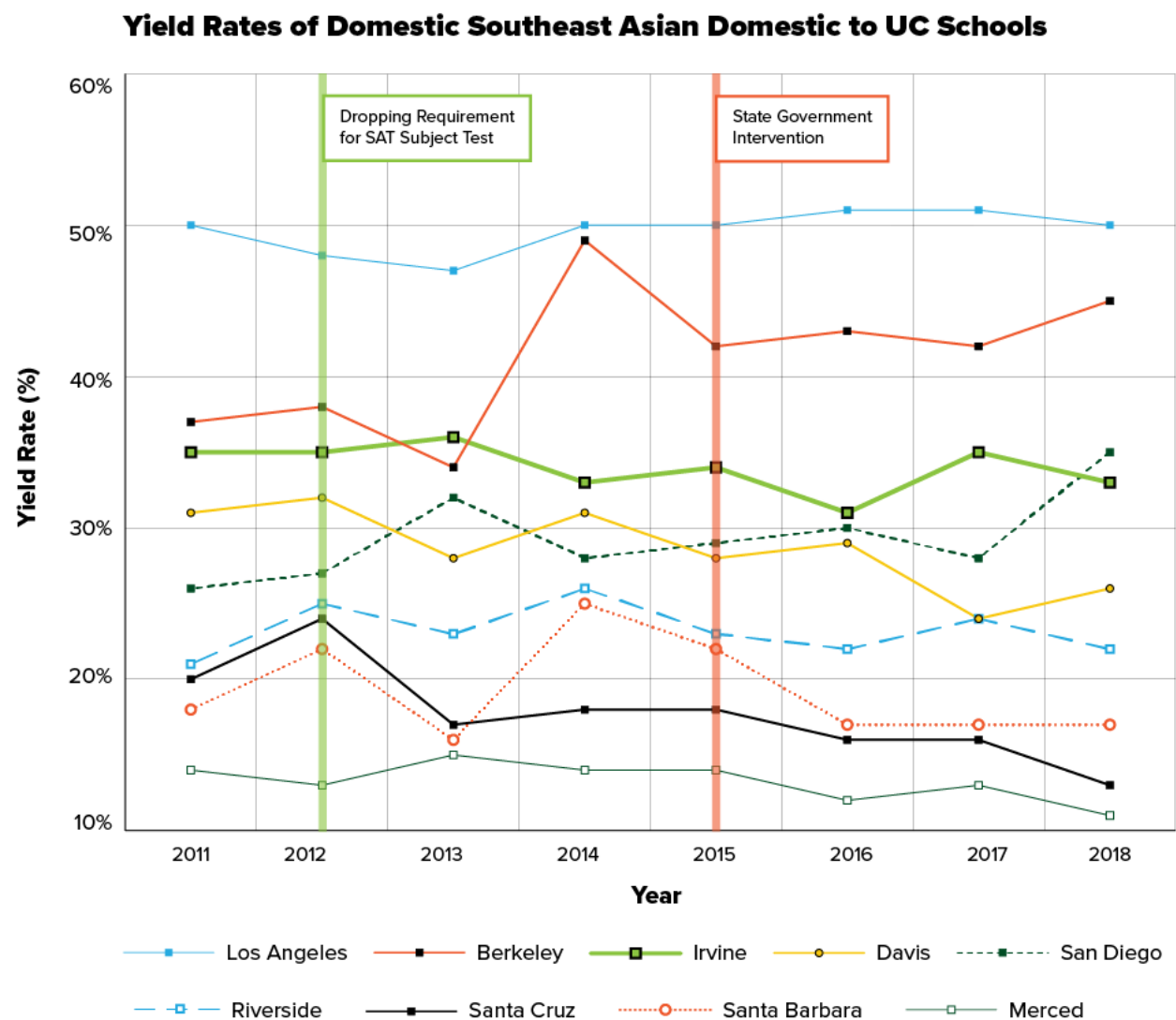


Figure 6 shows which schools that Southeast Asian Americans are more likely to enroll when given an admission offer. The most popular schools for admitted Southeast Asian Americans at which to enroll were Los Angeles, Berkeley, Irvine, Davis, and San Diego between 2011 and 2018.

Figure 6: Yield Rates of Domestic Southeast Asian Domestic to UC Schools (2011-2018)



Conclusion

After dropping the SAT II admissions requirement, the UC system increased access to its campuses, especially for Southeast Asian Americans. Admissions and enrollment systems are areas of public debate often muddled by fear and misunderstandings. As some research has found, the elimination of test requirements in admissions does not guarantee increased racial and ethnic equity in college access⁶. Instead, intentional legislative action and other systemic changes may hold more promise for opening access for more students.

⁷ Belasco, A. S., Rosinger, K. O., & Hearn, J. C. (2015). The Test-Optional Movement at America's Selective Liberal Arts Colleges: A Boon for Equity or Something Else? *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 37(2), 206–223. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0162373714537350>

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Appendix

Utilizing disaggregated data provided by U.C. System that indicates undergrad admissions and enrollment, we were able to use descriptive statistics to determine the number of applications, admit rate, and yield rate. It is important to note that since 2010, the numbers indicated for each group can be duplicated and are not unique since students were able to select multiple categories.

Domestic refers to anyone who were U.S. citizens, permanent residents, refugees, amnesty recipients, approved petitioners, or political/religious asylees. It does NOT indicate California residency.

Admit rate was measured by dividing the number of admitted students by the number of applications received. Yield rate was measured by dividing the number of enrolled students by the number of students admitted.

The limitations of using the disaggregated data set provided by the U.C. system indicates that it does not account for multiracial or multiethnic people, so the dataset does have duplicate numbers. The dataset provided also does not account for those who identify as California citizens versus out-of-state students.