

# University as a Design Problem Final Project

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# Problem Statement

# Wicked Problem

The U.S. college admissions process perpetuates systemic inequities by favoring students with wealth and access to resources. This demands a paradigm shift toward equity, mission-driven evaluation, and inclusivity.

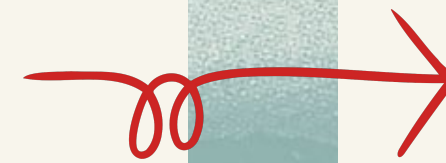
- **No one-size-fits all answer**
- **Hard to measure success**
- **Symptom of larger systems**
- **Explanation determines the problem's resolution**
  - **Incentives resist change**
  - **Every solution creates new problems**

## What cultural changes are we seeing?

- Pushback against luxury-focused college experiences
- Political and legislative pressures
- AI's impact on application review
- Rising costs and declining college attendance
- "Growth" of test-optional and alternative admissions models
- COVID-19 disrupted standardized testing

## What shift is needed?

- From opacity to transparency and trust
- From a uniform system to flexible, equitable models
- From general marketing to targeted recruitment
- From competition to fit and purpose
- From prestige-driven incentives to equity-focused outcomes



# Student-Centered Choice & University Specialization

Shift focus from mass appeal and amenities to highlighting their specific academic programs, teaching styles, and educational missions.

Students are encouraged select colleges based on academic fit, pedagogy, environment, and affordability, rather than just prestige or fear of rejection.

## Alternative Admission Process

More schools are experimenting with or adopting alternatives to the traditional application.

Such as, automatic admissions based on GPA, discussion-based interviews, holistic evaluations, or experience-focused applications.

## Transparency & Trust

Shift to making the admissions process more transparent and students can receive feedback on admissions decisions.



## Emerging Paradigms

## California State Universities (CSU system)

Automatic acceptance for California students with a 3.0 GPA to several CSU campuses — focusing on **local access and affordability**.

## University of Texas System (OnRamps Program):

Dual enrollment program where Texas students can **earn college credit** in high school and **gain automatic admission** to the UT system.

## St. John's College Multi-Application System:

Offers two types of applications:  
Traditional: (with essays, transcripts, etc.)  
**Discussion-Based Application:** Interviews with admissions staff and faculty, an online seminar, and submission of a graded academic paper.

## Minerva University:

Admissions process that focuses on the applicant's experiences, passions, and critical thinking skills rather than test scores; application is free and holistic.

## University of California System:

Permanently dropped SAT/ACT testing requirements for admissions after 2020; test scores (if submitted) only used for placement after acceptance.

## Georgetown University:

Chose to reinstate mandatory SAT/ACT submissions post-pandemic, arguing that optional testing harms students from under-resourced high schools.



# What kinds of interventions are needed?



## Reimagining Student Mindsets:

Encourage students to apply to schools that fit their goals, learning styles, and financial situations.

Decrease the pressure of applying to highly competitive institutions just for status.

## Targeted Recruitment & Local Focus:

Recruit students based on academic fit and geographic ties (e.g., prioritizing in-state or local students).

Provide early access through dual enrollment or guaranteed admission programs.

## Equity-Focused Practices:

Design policies to uplift marginalized and low-income students.

Eliminate systemic barriers like costly prep, elite school access, and over-emphasis on high test scores.

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