

From: Jocelyn De Jong jddejong@berkeley.edu
Subject: Re: Organized Cheating Scheme in Transfer Admissions
Date: April 1, 2024 at 12:50 PM
To: Adam A. Hillier ahillier@berkeley.edu
Cc: Office of the Chancellor chancellor@berkeley.edu, Olufemi A Ogundele olufemi@berkeley.edu



Hi,

Han Mi and I met with the Peralta VC to discuss this case as the emailer sent this just about all of the UC's and multiple people at each campus. Here is a summary Han Mi shared with the admissions directors:

What we were able to confirm is that the district is in contract with a consortium of international recruiting agents. These entities then "purchase" a set of courses for their students while the CCC provides the instructors. So the fact that students will have nearly the same academic record is expected, from the CCC's perspective. And this alone does not substantiate the claim that the student is not actually doing the work. This is year 2 of their contract with the consortium so again the bump in applicants is expected. We are looking into a few other oddities, including the potential of a motive and that the source of the report is not likely a student at all, and hope to be able to discuss when we meet on April 8.

In the meantime, I will work with legal counsel to ask ASAA to remove any reference to UC on their website.

Let me know if I can provide any additional information.

Thanks,

Jocelyn

On Mon, Apr 1, 2024 at 12:34 PM Adam A. Hillier <ahillier@berkeley.edu> wrote:

Good morning!

Thank you for passing this over. We have tried to investigate this a number of ways, and I have spoken to Jocelyn, copied, about this, as well. A number of staff in and out of the Office of Undergraduate Admissions received this and we ultimately have no information to act upon (the sender is not in our applications; the accused is not listed with identifiable/searchable information). We ultimately decided to share this with the Peralta College District, just for awareness.

I appreciate you sending this over.

Best,
Adam

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Berkeley Office of Undergraduate Admissions
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA



On Mon, Apr 1, 2024 at 12:30 PM Office of the Chancellor <chancellor@berkeley.edu> wrote:

Hi Femi and Adam,

Khira asked that I share an anonymous version of the email we received below with the two of you. We have responded to the original email letting them know we received it and would send it to admissions. Please treat this as you normally would any other

Original email text from XXX: No record of a name found. Please contact your advisor for more information. If you have any questions, please contact your advisor or the Office of Student Services at (415) 495-1234. Thank you for your message to your office.

Dear Chancellor Christ,

My name is XXX, an international student currently studying in the Peralta College District. UC Berkeley has been my dream school since childhood, deeply inspiring me with its unwavering commitment to academic integrity. Your long history of leading societal changes, mentoring community leaders, and ensuring education as a right for all, regardless of color of skins, background, and financial status, resonates deeply with me.

With a heavy heart, I am writing this email to report a situation at College of Alameda (COA) that could potentially undermine the integrity of your admissions process. I understand that coming forward in this way can be challenging, and I do not relish the idea of speaking negatively about others. However, I was deeply saddened to discover **a large group of students appearing to cooperatively and deliberately exploit loopholes within the system**, ultimately harming the values of academic integrity and fairness in admissions that UC Berkeley holds dear.

How I Encountered this Cheating

As you may know, Peralta College District consists of 4 colleges, including Berkeley City College (BCC), Laney College, Merritt College and College of Alameda (COA). This semester, I am taking an online course at BCC, and as part of the class's requirements, I was assigned to a group to work on a capstone project. Here, I encountered a student from College of Alameda.

Since the very beginning of the project, we noticed that he was constantly underperforming, not able to complete his assigned tasks. He apologized for his limited English proficiency, requiring us to type things out during Zoom meetings for translation. He didn't recognize the word "thesis" and basic academic concepts like "MLA format" or "citations" were completely foreign to him. Besides, he expressed confusion regarding Google Drive, powerpoint presentations and all kinds of tools that college students use on a daily basis.

Initially, assuming he was a newly enrolled COA student adjusting to the college environment, all our team members were very nice, offering him assistance. As an international student myself who went through the painful period of adapting, I helped him hand in hand, to understand the class material, and walk him through important concepts in English writing, project delivery, as well as how to use various online tools.

However, our perception shifted dramatically when he told us it was his final semester at COA, with a transfer application to UC Berkeley already submitted in 2023. We

were even more shocked when we learned that he had a perfect 4.0 GPA, including an A in his English class.

He explained his seemingly contradictory high GPA and limited English skills by revealing he had never attended classes in the US. Instead, he was taking them all remotely from China through a “Special Program” with support from teachers and tutors. Their “assistance” in his homework and exams ensured that he passed every class with a high grade. The reason why he was struggling with this particular class this semester was because this class was not part of their “Special Program” and hence there were no teachers or tutors helping him with the class.

While eventually, this student dropped the class before the withdrawal deadline, I was able to get a hold of him and understand a bit more about what he meant by the “Special Program”. And each zoom meeting and conversation between us unveiled a series of increasingly concerning and shocking details.

Not an Individual, but an Organized Cheating Scheme

According to him, the “program” he was a part of is called “ASAA”, a private for-profit company in China that has partnered with College of Alameda. He is part of their cohort of about 80 students, half of whom majoring in Economics, and the rest studying Math/Stats.

These students take their classes entirely online in China, and asynchronously through Canvas. All courses are from the same exact section with the same professors provided by COA. Since there are no lectures or live meetings, students do not ever need to speak English. All the homework, quizzes and exams are conducted online. The program appears to offer extensive support. Students receive instruction from Chinese teachers for specific course content delivered in their native language. Additionally, tutors are available to review and revise homework assignments and even assist with exams when students encounter difficulties.

As he shared with me, in his mandatory English 1A class, he didn’t need to learn anything. For all the homework, he simply needed to use ChatGPT to generate an essay and submit it to the professor, or in some cases, ask his tutors/teacher in the program for help. For his economics and math exams, as he shared, he already knew the answers to all the exam questions every time before the exams, because everyone was taking the same class, same section, and being tested on the same set of test questions. Answer sheets were “handed out” before exams. He shared with me while he didn’t know exactly everyone’s grade, roughly 70% of his peers also have a 4.0 GPA, while the rest either didn’t come to school at all or scored a less satisfactory grade when they chose to take an “extra” class outside of their program - which is how we initially met and how I learned about all this.

According to him, more than half of these 80 students, just like him and I, have submitted UC transfer applications, anxiously waiting for the result. Given their largely

submitted UC transfer applications, anxiously waiting for the result. Given their largely inflated 4.0 or 3.9 GPAs, this could have a significant impact on the admissions decisions.

My Struggles

To be very honest, my encounter with this student began at the semester's start. Over the past three months, I've grappled with a significant internal conflict. As we collaborated in our online class group project, we developed a personal connection, and I considered him a friend. I deeply value integrity and find it difficult to speak negatively about others, especially in private. Initially, I chose to remain silent, internalizing these concerns and convincing myself that unfairness exists. However, as I delved deeper into the so-called "Special Program" and its implications, the situation troubled me more.

Coming from a less developed country, I lack the privilege of attending a program like this student's. Many other students and I have diligently pursued our academic goals at BCC, facing significant challenges. These experiences have led to recurring anxieties. Every single night, when I close my eyes, and fall asleep, the same episode of nightmares would emerge — 50, 60 or 70 students landed their spots at UC Berkeley based on organized academic irregularities and well-designed cheatings, displacing deserving applicants who relied on hard work, extracurricular involvement, and dedication.

Over the past three months, I've consulted with a trusted professor and sought mental health counseling from two therapists. They all strongly encouraged me to report this information to UC admissions. They believe it's not a betrayal of friendship but rather an effort to ensure fairness, equity, and uphold UC's commitment to accessible and equitable education for all.

In conclusion, I submit this report with the hope that it receives your immediate attention and a thorough investigation. This well-designed scheme of organized academic irregularities could have a significant negative impact on deserving students across various backgrounds. If left unchecked, it could undermine the value of hard work and dedication that students like myself, from Peralta District and beyond, invest in their academic journeys. A comprehensive review of this situation is crucial to ensure the integrity and fairness of UC's admissions process.

Thanks for your time and consideration. I look forward to your response regarding this matter.

Sincerely,
A Prospective Transfer Student

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Office of the Chancellor

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