development of a broad program of cultural diplomacy, polytechnic universities are less able to contribute to debates over global governance or exercises in cross-cultural dialogue than comprehensive universities such as Peking, Fudan, and Nanjing. While some polytechnic universities have partnered with institutions abroad in the founding of Confucius Institutes, their orientation is more likely toward Chinese language for business purposes rather than philosophical exchange or intercultural understanding.

The most striking example of the spirit of China's contemporary polytechnic universities comes from the world-famous Academic Ranking of World Universities spawned by Shanghai Jiao Tong University. The indicators it uses for comparing universities globally are almost entirely in the arena of scientific research and publication, with little attention to teaching quality or educational reputation and ethos. This puts China's universities generally in lower positions than does the ranking system of the *Times Higher Education* Supplement, which has a broader array of indicators. It also reflects the limitations of a university such as Shanghai Jiao Tong, which has a brilliant history in the engineering sciences going back to 1897 and has recently taken over one of Shanghai's top medical universities but is relatively weak in the humanities, social sciences, and education. ■

Inclusiveness in Elite Universities: The Case of Oxford

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Surrounding elite universities—like Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard, Tokyo, and the *grandes écoles*—is the myth that access is hard to acquire. Not everyone who wishes to attend is selected to enroll. Harvard, ranked number one in various national and international league tables, admits fewer than 1 in 10 of its applicants for undergraduate study. The ancient English universities, Oxford and Cambridge, admit about 1 in 4 of their applicants.

The University of Oxford can be used as a case study to illustrate three basic challenges faced in admitting undergraduates at highly selective universities. These issues arise at a normative (philosophical), empirical (social research), and policy level: Who *should* gain admission to our most prestigious and selective universities? What *is* the profile of those who are actually admitted? And, lastly, how could we *change* enrollment patterns if we wished to do so? While the specific answers to these questions may vary by country, the three issues themselves are relevant regardless of national context.

Who Should Be Admitted?

Universities are responsive to their social context and to ideas about who deserves to be successful in their society. The social context in Britain—in politics or the media—is dominated by discussions of social class. A strong sense exists that one's life chances should not be determined by the accident of having been born to parents in professional occupations rather than those employed in manual jobs. Nonetheless, and to the dismay of large sections of society and policymakers, what one's parents do for a living continues to influence educational achievement, and more affluent parents frequently opt out of the public (meaning, state) school system to give their children an advantage through private education. In Britain, fewer than 1 in 10 school learners are enrolled in private schooling, but about 1 in 2 of the top results in school leaving examinations and 1 in 2 of the most desirable university places, such as Oxford and Cambridge, are awarded to those who attended private schools.

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While these specific figures might be unique to Britain, it will not be a surprise to see some link between social origin and educational attainment. The recent Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's Program for International Student Assessment reveals that no industrialized country has managed to neutralize the influence of schooling and class origin. What makes the British case unusual is that the government has established a body dedicated to overseeing university enrollment figures by school type. This Office for Fair Access sets targets for individual universities, regarding the percentage of private and public school students they are expected to admit. The mission is to increase the representation of those educated in the public school system and to enhance fairness in education.

Universities are expected not to exacerbate—perhaps, instead, even to reprove—some of the limitations of primary and secondary education, to provide a completely level playing field for every child to develop his or her academic potential. The focus is on private and public schools and social class, as opposed to the well-publicized focus on race in US university

admissions. One would expect the specific national framing of diversity, whether in terms of race or class origin, to have an impact on the actual profile of admitted students.

Who Is Actually Admitted?

Policies do not always equal practices, so in 2002 the University of Oxford conducted a research project on its selection process to see whether it was living up to its promise to select fairly—based on ability and potential, regardless of class origin and private or public schooling. Ethnicity and gender, with regard to admission, were also studied but were of lesser interest to the commissioning team.

The study found that the profile of individuals who applied to Oxford was skewed with a drop in representation of those from working-class origins and from public schools, compared with the population of school leavers. The gap in representation was decreased when taking into account that working-class and public-school students were underrepresented among high-achieving school leavers. Minority students are usually overrepresented in higher education but were neither over- nor underrepresented among applicants to Oxford. There was almost gender parity in applications.

With regard to success in obtaining admission *conditional on having applied*, the study compared applicants on a like-for-like basis—that is, matched on their prior attainment. Here, the researchers found that selectors for Oxford favored public-school applicants over private-school applicants with the same attainment records. This preference had remained largely hidden from the public eye because private school students often apply with slightly higher attainment records than their publicly educated peers. When comparing applicants with the same attainment record by ethnicity, there was a disadvantage for being nonwhite.

Changing Enrollment

Policymakers will find some good and bad news in this research. The good news is the possibility of changing enrollment patterns at universities. A few decades ago, Oxford was perceived as a bastion of privilege, but internal and external forces have created a meritocratic revolution whereby now prior attainment is the most important factor in selection. With the Office for Fair Access providing targets for public-school intake, Oxford selectors are trained to increase the share of public school applicants gaining admission to Oxford and have succeeded. In actual admissions decisions, public-school applicants with the same prior attainment as applicants from private schools are judged to be of greater potential. This trend seems in line with the desired policy outcome to increase the representation of students from the public-school system in the most prestigious British universities.

The bad news, however, is that individuals who suffer social inequality and do not enjoy the same public salience might go unnoticed. In the Oxford context, selectors are neither trained nor monitored to ensure that minorities are admitted in line with the strength of their academic profile in the application pool. Possibly, the face-to-face admissions process at Oxford could have some self-reproductive tendencies. Thus, predominantly white selectors might, possibly inadvertently, select according to their own stereotypes. Such self-reproductive processes have been well documented in the psychological literature and in the context of employment hiring.

If policymakers sought to increase the representation of minority students at leading British universities, they might thus wish to start this process by raising selectors' awareness. In the United States, the salience of race in public debates has certainly contributed to the comparatively high percentage of minority students enrolled at the nation's leading universities. But again, this particular policy success may have allowed other sources of inequality, such as differences in schooling, to influence educational outcomes.

The case of Oxford illustrates that universities are responsive to the social climate in which they operate. The undergraduate selection process can take into account the perceived wishes of government and society: achieving more inclusiveness in enrollment at selective universities is possible. However, deciding which groups are targeted for further inclusion—public school students, minorities, and others—might be relative to the national consensus on who is thought to be deserving of a place at the nation's most-selective universities. ■

Private Providers of Higher Education in the United Kingdom

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A recent research report from Universities UK has analyzed the growth of private providers of higher education in the United Kingdom and questioned whether they are a threat to the publicly funded sector (*The Growth of Private and For-Profit Higher Education Providers in the UK,* <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/Publications/Pages/Privateandforprofitproviders.