

Wei-Li Sun

Los Angeles, CA

June 30, 2008

Assistant Chancellor - Legal Affairs  
University of California, Berkeley  
CO-Lgl Aff  
200 Cal Hall # 1500  
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Dear [REDACTED]:

I am a Berkeley alumnus, class of 1997, who spends much of my free time volunteering on behalf of the University. On two separate occasions, staff members of the University's Office of Undergraduate Admissions (OUA) have berated and accused me of malfeasance in association with my volunteering efforts on behalf of prospective students. I write concerning whether the University has any guidelines on the interactions between the OUA and its alumni, and whether I or the OUA have acted improperly.

For the past three years, I have volunteered with the OUA on high school outreach programs. I attend high school college fairs across Los Angeles County on behalf of Berkeley, explaining the admission requirements and distributing admissions material to high school students. I donated my time to the CAL Experience program in 2006, chaperoning a group of 20 high school students on a 3-day visit to Berkeley's campus. I have also interviewed students for alumni scholarships and have participated in the alumni association's letter-writing program to compose personalized letters to both incoming and graduating Berkeley students.

To cope with the high volume of questions I get at high school college fairs, and to address the difficulty students have in finding the correct information on the various UC admissions websites, I started a blog<sup>1</sup> to answer commonly asked questions concerning admissions to the UC Campuses with a special emphasis on Berkeley and UCLA. To ensure that my blog provides students with the most reliable and accurate information possible, I try to go straight to the source, often citing information from the University of California's website or directly contacting the OUA. I have never charged students for

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<sup>1</sup> "The Unofficial Guide to UC Berkeley / UCLA Admissions" located at <http://ucadmissions.livejournal.com/>.

my assistance. Rather, I view this work as my way of giving back to the University that gave me so much. I know that my blog has made a positive impact on students' lives, as reflected by the numerous compliments and notes of appreciation I have received from applicants since I started blogging.

My first negative experience with the OUA occurred on September 26, 2007. [REDACTED], Associate Director of OUA, telephoned me regarding my blog. [REDACTED] accused me of impersonating a Berkeley admissions representative and giving out "bad information." I pointed out to [REDACTED] the word "unofficial" appears within the title of my blog and that there was a prominent disclaimer<sup>2</sup> on the web site. [REDACTED] was not satisfied with my explanation, and continued to accuse me of defrauding the public. She badgered me for 15 minutes regarding my alleged misdeeds and concluded the conversation by saying "we'll see what [REDACTED] has to say about this." I was appalled by the tenor of the phone call and [REDACTED]'s demeanor toward me. I chose not to make a complaint at the time because I was uncertain of how the OUA thought of my work with the students and was afraid of retaliatory actions against me or the students with whom I work.

While my experience with [REDACTED] was discouraging, I did not give up on working with high school students interested in applying to UC schools. However, I had broadened my information source to include sources beyond the OUA so that I would not be entirely dependent on that office for information. For this reason, I paid \$290 to attend the Western Association for College Admission Counseling (WACAC) conference held in Las Vegas from May 28-30, 2008 to get a wider perspective of admissions information.

The conference started off quite well, as I obtained many interesting sources of information to pass on to the students who read my blog. For obvious reasons, I was especially looking forward to the seminar presented on May 29 featuring admissions representatives from several UC campuses. At the end the seminar, I introduced myself as an independent counselor who worked exclusively with students interested in applying to the UCs and lightheartedly indicated that I would be happy to answer any questions as well. Apparently, this comment drew the ire of [REDACTED], Assistant Director of OUA, as he sought me out after the seminar. He angrily informed me that I was "out of line" and conveyed his belief that I was purposefully misleading the attendees of the seminar into thinking that I worked for the UCs. I attempted to explain to [REDACTED] that it was never my intention to mislead anyone, and that I was sorry if he had misconstrued my comment. [REDACTED] refused to accept this explanation and continued to badger me on the subject.

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<sup>2</sup> "This blog is not affiliated with the University of California. I am not employed by the University of California or any of its campuses nor am I a licensed counselor. My advice is based on my experience interacting with the admission staff at UC Berkeley and UCLA but it is not sanctioned by the University of California or any of its campuses."

More disturbingly, [REDACTED] also criticized my efforts to assist students in navigating the UC admissions process. He stated his belief that my job should be limited to simply referring students to him or other admissions staff on campus. Ironically, previous to this conference, I had forwarded no fewer than three student inquiries to [REDACTED]'s attention, without ever receiving a reply from him. When I pointed this out to him, he denied that I had ever sent any such e-mails, using the circuitous logic that if I had sent him the e-mails, he would have gotten them, ignoring the possibility that they might have been caught by a spam filter, or that he didn't read them. I was also physically intimidated by [REDACTED], who previously disclosed his background as a former United States Marine. At this point, I realized that [REDACTED] had made up his mind about me, so I politely excused myself and left the conference early the next morning.

I am saddened that the OUA would view me and my work with such skepticism and open hostility. My only goal in working with students is to help them navigate the sometimes dense thicket of information they are confronted with upon applying to the UCs. It has never been my intention to usurp the position of the OUA. Rather, I think of myself as a free, secondary resource for overwhelmed students and a friendly voice in a sometimes unfriendly process. I'm offended by the notion that I should be simply forwarding e-mails to [REDACTED], especially in light of the fact that when I have done this, the students did not receive any sort of response to their inquiries!

In light of my two encounters with staff members of the OUA, I believe the University should address how I was treated. In both instances, the staff members have implicitly or explicitly expressed that I was out of line. From my volunteering experience and interactions with the staff, I was never once presented with any guidance as to how I should conduct myself with the staff and/or prospective students. I think it's patently unfair to accuse me of being out of line, when no one has ever identified where the line is drawn.

I would be happy to discuss this matter at your earliest convenience. You may call me at ([REDACTED]) [REDACTED]-[REDACTED].

Sincerely,

Wei-Li Sun

cc: [REDACTED], Chancellor  
[REDACTED], Director of Office of Undergraduate Admissions  
[REDACTED], Director of Alumni Relations  
[REDACTED], Manager of Alumni and Student Relations  
[REDACTED], Chairperson of Southern CAL Alumni Coalition