

## **AI in College Admissions: Algorithmic Acceptance?**

Many colleges have started leaning on Artificial Intelligence (AI) to help manage the flood of applications for admission. In some places, the first screen isn't a person at all but a machine that checks whether an applicant clears basic thresholds before passing them along for human review. At UNC-Chapel Hill, for example, the student paper *The Daily Tar Heel* reported that admissions essays are sometimes run through "Reader AI," occasionally without a human ever looking at the writing itself. Some companies, like Othot, go a step further. Their enrollment analytics software assigns real-time scores predicting whether a student is likely to enroll. These cases raise serious ethical questions about the admissions process: should AI be the gatekeeper of opportunity?

Proponents of these tools argue that the use of AI is almost unavoidable when a flagship university receives tens of thousands of applications with limited staff. They point out that AI predictive models can sort through routine data like GPAs and demographics much more quickly and consistently than can people, allowing students to be notified earlier of admissions decisions. Advocates even argue that good predictive models can surface "hidden gems," such as first-generation or low-income high performers who might otherwise be overlooked. In that sense, AI may help promote equity while keeping admission rates manageable.

Skeptics see it differently. AI tools trained on past admissions data often carry forward the very biases they are supposed to erase. As *Inside Higher Ed* has reported, platforms like Othot's predictive analytics system, which generates enrollment 'likelihood scores,' can unintentionally disadvantage multilingual, rural, or under-resourced applicants. Brookings analysts warn that tying financial aid or admission to "yield scores" treats students like commodities instead of recognizing their merit. In addition, there is the accountability gap between the AI vendors and the admission offices, and rejected students have no real path to appeal. Without transparent reviews and genuine human checks, speeding up admissions decisions through AI risks sacrificing fairness and undermining public confidence.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Is it fair for an application to be accepted or rejected without any human reviewing it?
2. Does the use of AI by college admissions offices dehumanize students?

3. How should universities respond to the risk that AI tools trained on biased historical data can perpetuate or amplify existing inequalities, unfairly penalizing underrepresented groups?
4. What level of transparency do students deserve about the reasons for admission decisions?

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