Admissions Fraud is Symptomatic of a Larger Problem

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An incredible admissions scandal was exposed Tuesday by the Department of Justice, one implicating many of the nation’s premier institutions of higher learning (“The high prices of admission,” Page A1, March 13). Federal authorities issued 50 indictments in a scheme allegedly involving faux athletes, coaches who were bribed, cheating on the SAT and ACT, million-dollar bribes, and “guarantees” that certain applicants would be admitted to highly competitive colleges.

Sadly, this story hit close to home, including my own university: the University of Texas at Austin, where the tennis coach already has been placed on administrative leave.

Aside from the obvious magnitude of this story, perhaps unparalleled in the history of university admissions, we should be concerned about the larger and more endemic problem underscored by this scandal.

First, the charges of admissions fraud come at a time when many call the practice of race-based admissions unfair and discriminatory. Ironically, unlike the latest admissions scandals, which involved placing a heavy thumbprint on the scale, race can be used as only one factor among many in reviewing an applicant’s credentials — something the Supreme Court ruled is perfectly legal.

Second, as Robert Reich and others observe, the overarching crisis revealed Tuesday is economic — a “concentration of wealth in America.” It now appears that buying admissions is yet another symptom of the larger problem of how those with money can buy elections, health care, justice, and citizenship — privileges often beyond the reach of those without sufficient assets.

It’s time for this country to have a serious conversation about the distribution of wealth, entitlement, inequality, and personal responsibility.

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