

Questions and Issues for Follow Up from Meeting #2 Eligibility and Admissions Study Group

Eligibility Questions

What percentage of California public high school graduates is eligible? What percentage of California public high school graduates takes the full 'a-g' course pattern and sits for the five SAT exams required by UC eligibility? Are all of the latter students UC-eligible?

The data are not available to answer this question. We can obtain information on test completers from the testing agencies, and we have access to aggregated information on 'a-g' completers from the California Department of Education. However, the information on 'a-g' completers does not include information on grade point average. It is the intersection of the three elements—tests, courses, and grades in those courses—that enables UC to determine eligibility. We do know that the California Department of Education estimates that 112,937 June 2002 public high school graduates completed the 'a-g' requirement (at that time, it was the 'a-f' requirement), and we do know that 59,836 public high school students completed the required examination pattern, but we do not have the 'a-f' grade point average for these students.

Periodic eligibility studies conducted by the California Postsecondary Education Commission (CPEC) are the primary and most authoritative source for information on eligibility. An updated study is currently being conducted on the class of 2003 and will be available in May 2004.

In the interim, as reported at the November meeting of the Study Group, UC staff have conducted preliminary analyses indicating that roughly 15.2 percent of California's public high school graduates may be meeting our current eligibility standards.

If the 2003 CPEC Eligibility Study shows that UC is admitting more than the top 12.5 percent of CA public high school graduates, how do BOARS and the Academic Senate propose making changes to bring us back to 12.5 percent?

In preparation for the release of the 2003 CPEC Eligibility Study, BOARS is devoting a portion of each meeting during the 2003-04 year to a discussion of principles that will guide planning for revised eligibility criteria in light of anticipated study outcomes. BOARS has also identified a research agenda to inform discussion of current student performance in relationship to existing eligibility criteria, and expects to develop and review a number of options for revisions to the current requirements, as necessary. Assuming that the 2003 CPEC study will be released in May 2004, it is anticipated that BOARS will have preliminary recommendations for revised eligibility criteria in June 2004.

Admissions/Comprehensive Review Questions

1) Admitting from the full range of the pool

What is the rationale for admitting “from the full range of the pool?”

The academic rationale for admitting students to each campus from the full range of the UC eligibility pool is that, by virtue of having achieved UC eligibility, all of these students can succeed at any campus, and that a mix of students on a campus enriches the learning environment, both inside and outside the classroom. Educators understand that students who enter with different levels of academic preparation will not all perform at the highest levels. UC’s eligibility requirements provide an academic foundation that ensures a reasonable chance of success. The premise that all UC-eligible applicants can succeed at any campus is borne out by data on persistence, graduation, and GPAs earned at UC. (Study Group members will be given additional data on this topic at the January 13 meeting.) Each UC campus has an educational interest in admitting a mix of students who will contribute to the intellectual, cultural, and social environment on the campus. For example, many successful business and political leaders and artists and entertainers were not necessarily at the top of their class in college, but contributed in other ways and went on to make important contributions to society. Similarly, students from one region of the state or one kind of background have much to learn from others who are different from them.

The policy rationale for admitting students to each campus from the full range of the eligibility pool is that, as a public, land-grant university, the University of California has a special obligation to offer opportunity to students from throughout California and this offer of opportunity extends to some degree to all campuses, not just a subset of them. UC’s eligibility and admissions criteria have acknowledged this responsibility from the university’s inception, by laying out objective systemwide criteria that can be easily understood; by working to ensure that high-quality college preparatory coursework is available in every public high school in California; by reaching out, first, to women and students from all geographic regions and, later, to racial and ethnic minorities, to poor and immigrant students, and to students in schools that historically have sent fewer students on to higher education.

What is the derivation of this policy? Has it been approved by The Regents?

During the period when campuses could admit all eligible applicants, there was no need for specific policy direction regarding the desirability of admitting from the full range of the pool. However, the idea that UC should balance academic achievement with other factors has been expressed in policy documents throughout the University’s history. For example, the 1957 predecessor to the Master Plan, the *Study of the Need for Additional Centers of Public Higher Education*, concluded that restricting access to UC campuses to only the very highest achievers was undesirable because “the qualities of leadership so important to success in business and the professions are not necessarily confined to a smaller percentage of the high school graduating class.”

The University's first written policy guidelines for choosing among UC-eligible applicants, promulgated by the Office of the President in 1971 (see Item IV-9 in Study Group materials for the December 16 meeting), directed campuses to admit no more than half of their students from among those with the highest academic rankings and to admit the remaining students based on a review of their other achievements, personal qualities, and the University's diversity goals, as well as academic factors. At the time, the intent of these guidelines was to ensure that no single campus or group of campuses selected more than its share of the most academically qualified applicants, but rather that these applicants be distributed across all of the campuses, including those that had just opened. Thus, the underlying goal of this policy was an institutional desire not to prefer any one campus—which would create a hierarchy among UC campuses—but rather to ensure that all remained of relatively equal stature.

This policy goal also served in the 1970s and 1980s to ensure that all campuses built student bodies that were broadly diverse, in terms of socio-economic, geographical, cultural, and racial/ethnic background. This goal is embodied in The Regents' 1988 policy on undergraduate admissions which calls for a student body on *every* campus that “demonstrates high academic achievement *or* exceptional personal talent, and that encompasses the broad diversity of...backgrounds characteristic of California” (emphasis added). This policy directed each campus to develop procedures for selection from eligible applicants that were consistent with these principles. Shortly after this policy was adopted by The Regents, OP revised its earlier guidelines, specifying that selective campuses (which at the time included only UC Berkeley and UCLA) admit no less than 40 percent and no more than 60 percent of their incoming classes on academic criteria alone. These guidelines, like their predecessors, were considered administrative in nature—in that they were designed to provide guidance on the selection of eligible students—and were not formally approved by The Regents.

The “two-tier” policy embedded in the 1971 and 1988 guidelines was incorporated in Regents' Resolution SP-1 (1995), which changed the proportions for the two different groups, restricting admissions on academic achievement alone to 50-75 percent of the incoming class. In 2001, Regents' Resolution RE-28 eliminated the two-tier process and incorporated, by reference, the criteria from the *Guidelines for Implementation of University Policy on Undergraduate Admissions* (as revised in 2000). Later the same year, when they adopted comprehensive review, BOARS amended the 2000 *Guidelines* to eliminate headings that identified some criteria as “academic” and others as “supplemental” and to add BOARS' principles for comprehensive review. The criteria utilized for selection remained unchanged.

2) Differences among campuses

How do campus processes differ?

Admissions policies and processes on the six selective UC campuses share a great deal in common. All are guided by the same University-wide admissions policy, principles, and

criteria. All evaluate students based on identical information provided on a single application. All observe a common calendar and set of deadlines. At the same time, campuses differ in three general areas:

- 1) They place slightly different weights on different factors. At all campuses, academic factors dominate the decision process. But campuses differ to a minor degree in the weight they place on individual factors. (For example, one campus might place substantially more weight on a student's GPA than on test scores, while others might weight these two factors more closely.)
- 2) Campuses differ slightly in the ways they use evidence from the application to evaluate students relative to particular criteria. For example, the comprehensive review policy directs all campuses to consider the context in which students achieve, recognizing that opportunity and resources are not evenly distributed across the state and students who have not had access to resources in some areas (e.g., Advanced Placement courses) cannot reasonably be expected to demonstrate achievement in these particular areas at the same rate as others who have had greater resources. But campuses differ in the way they implement this directive. UC Berkeley and UCLA, for example, consider individual applicants' academic achievement within the context of their own high schools, reasoning that applicants from the same school have had access to a relatively similar set of school resources. Other campuses assign extra points in their processes to students from disadvantaged schools, compensating for the reduced resources such schools offer.
- 3) The processes that campuses use to evaluate students qualifications differ somewhat. In most cases these differences lead to similar decision; at the margins they may not. As described at the December meeting of the Eligibility and Admissions Study Group, campus processes fall into three broad categories:
 - Fixed-weight, formula-based systems in which points are assigned for different factors and totaled to produce a score for each applicant. In these systems, some points are assigned based on computer algorithms and others are assigned by admissions readers evaluating non-quantitative aspects of the applicant's file. Admissions decisions are made by admitting those with the highest scores until admissions targets are reached. (Davis, San Diego, Santa Barbara)
 - Matrix-based, non-fixed-weight systems in which applicants are assigned scores for broad categories of qualifications (e.g., academic accomplishment and personal achievements) and students are admitted based on their combination of scores, with higher scores in one area compensating for lower scores in another. In these systems, some kinds of scores may be assigned by computer or in a computer-assisted process, while others are assigned by admissions readers evaluating non-quantitative aspects of the applicant's file. (Irvine, Los Angeles)
 - Unitary, non-fixed-weight systems in which applicants are assigned a single score that reflects the totality of the student's achievements and qualifications

and students are admitted based on their rank order on this score. In this kind of system, scores are assigned by admissions readers evaluating both quantitative and non-quantitative aspects of the applicant's file. (Berkeley)

How do we justify these differences?

Campus processes differ for a number of reasons. Perhaps the most important is the degree of selectivity and the academic quality of the campus applicant pool. A campus that is able to admit most of its eligible applicants does not need a process that allows for fine distinctions among all of its applicants. On the other hand, a campus with a particularly highly qualified pool that can admit only a small fraction of those applicants will require a process that allows it to identify relatively small differences among very highly qualified applicants in order to decide which it can admit. In this kind of process, virtually all of the admitted students will present very high academic qualifications and admissions decisions among them may rest on additional information that is only gleaned from a careful evaluation of non-quantitative information in the file. The Berkeley campus presents an example of a campus that has evolved over time from one that relied on a fixed-weight formula, to a matrix-based approach, to full qualitative review of each individual application and assignment of a single unitary score.

In addition, each campus process has been designed by a faculty committee and thus expresses to some degree the particular values that have dominated that committee over time. One committee may traditionally prefer a fixed-weight system, while another finds fixed weights undesirable. Regents' and Academic Senate policies function to establish clear parameters within which such variations are acceptable. Just as in many other areas of the University's operation, campuses may use quite different means to accomplish the same end and the existence of differences per se has not been seen as a problem in itself.

Are there areas that can/should be standardized among the campuses?

Virtually all areas of the admissions selection process could be standardized and a great number of them are already. Campuses frequently adopt practices of other campuses if they feel these represent an improvement. Additionally, both BOARS and campus admissions staffs believe that there is a great deal of opportunity to improve campus processes with further standardization and this work is underway. This issue will be addressed in greater depth at the January meeting.

Outreach Questions

How do campuses weight student involvement in UC outreach programs in the selection process? How does this compare to weighting for involvement in other academic programs? In selection, do campuses give weight to participation in outreach programs, length and type of program involvement, or student achievement in programs?

The University seeks to enroll students who take initiative in pursuing their education, and seeks to understand a student's motivation and dedication to learning. Consistent with faculty and Regental guidelines, consideration is afforded to a broad variety of academic enrichment programs including programs that have a particular academic focus, such as science, language or the performing arts; summer enrichment, faculty-sponsored research or academic development programs; and, University and community-sponsored educational outreach programs.

Campuses assess student involvement in these programs during the application review process in a variety of ways. At UC Irvine, for example, the reader considers participation in UC-approved programs (including both UC-affiliated and non-UC-affiliated academic enrichment programs), as well as other educational enrichment programs, as one of the plus factors in the comprehensive review process. However, the reviewer goes beyond simple consideration, examining the level and duration of the applicant's involvement, and seeking information that would inform whether the enrichment program is related to academic, talent, or skill development. The Admissions Director notes: "Our comprehensive review includes consideration of academic promise and achievement in an enrichment program, including but not limited to those sponsored by the University of California. This criterion will be measured by time and depth of participation, by the academic progress made by the applicant during that participation, and by the intellectual rigor of the particular program."

At UC San Diego, reviewers look for length and depth of involvement, assigning 0, 75, 150, or 300 points depending upon the length and depth of involvement in the particular program. According to the Admissions Director, "ideally the applicant will have discussed the scope of involvement in the program and the impact that participation has had in preparing the student for college. Unfortunately, few students spend the time describing this experience; therefore, we look at the length of time the student has been involved in the program (weeks, months, years) and for any description of the program provided by the student. If there is insufficient information, we do not award points."

At UC Santa Barbara, outreach program participation is one way to demonstrate qualities such as persistence, initiative, and motivation but these qualities may be demonstrated by applicants in any number of other activities. For all activities, the number of years and hours per week are considered.

This practice of awarding consideration for achievement in outreach programs is similar at the three remaining selective campuses—Berkeley, Davis, and Los Angeles. At all UC

campuses, the focus is on active, sustained participation *and* achievement in academic enrichment programs.

A review of campuses practices on the use of outreach program consideration in admissions has, however, identified one anomaly that is inconsistent with the intent of the *2001 Guidelines for Implementation of University Policy on Undergraduate Admissions*. UCLA has been awarding Life Challenges Level (LCL) credit based on simple program participation. [*Note: This is in addition to consideration accorded in UCLA's Personal Achievement Review, as indicated above.*] The practice of awarding LCL credit based on simple participation will be discontinued beginning with the Fall 2005 application cycle.

Participation in outreach programs is one of many self-reported fields on the application that is subject to UC's verification process.