

ADMISSIONS COMMUNICATION STRATEGY (2004-2005)

Eligibility & Admissions Study Group

OBJECTIVE

To describe the UC admissions process to the public in an open and understandable way.

GOALS

The communications efforts described below reinforce three essential standards that Study Group members have emphasized in their discussions:

Be Clear

- Use clear, common vocabulary across the system to describe to parents and students the choices available to them, the rules for becoming eligible, how to prepare academically, how to apply and how each campus chooses its students.
- Provide candid, specific descriptions of all criteria considered in admission, how campuses judge each of these criteria and the relative influence of each in evaluating an application.

Be Accessible

- Once the information is clear, make it easy to find. Create consistent and complementary tools across campuses and OP that the public can learn to rely on for the most up-to-date and accurate information.
- Broaden information distribution to include more direct communication with parents and others who influence students' decisions (teachers, counselors, coaches, community leaders).
- Conduct formal and informal research to measure comprehensibility and availability of information across the state and among different communities.

Be Realistic

- Provide information that helps students gauge their chances of being admitted to each campus and understand why they don't get in.
- Keep the public abreast of the rapidly changing admissions environment and the increased competition for spaces across the UC system. Highlight the importance of thoughtful college choices and the opportunities available at all UC campuses.
- Convey the values that make up the foundation of the admissions process.

TOOLS AND TIMELINES

Goal: Clarity

1. **Redesign the application.** This process began last year with a new design that provided a clearer step-by-step path through the application, with more tips and computer prompts to reduce student errors. Enhancements such as pre-populating applications for Eligibility in the Local Context (ELC) students reduce the amount of information students enter from scratch and increase accuracy for campus processing.

Timeline: Initial redesign completed 10/03;
enhancements for 2005 to be completed by 7/04

2. **Create 'virtual tour' of the application.** This Flash tour was created last year as a guide for students who apply without in-person help. It has also been used as a training tool for high school and community college counselors, UC outreach staff and community group members.
Timeline: Completed 10/03; enhancements for 2005 to be completed 9/04

3. **Hold focus groups.** We are working with a consultant to convene several student and parent focus groups to test proposed language and new materials, gather common questions and pinpoint where the process is confusing or unclear.
Timeline: To be convened 3/04
Cost: \$40,000 - \$65,000

4. **Simplify descriptions of paths to eligibility.** At-a-glance summaries of the different rules to qualify for admission were used in a postcard-style mailer and in counselor conferences last fall; a similar approach will be used with *Introducing the University* and related web sites this year.
Timeline: To be completed 4/04

5. **Develop common definitions of comprehensive review factors.** Sue Wilbur is working with BOARS and campus admissions committees to devise a process for creating common definitions of terminology such as "low SES" or "leadership." Once in place, these definitions will be used to provide consistent terminology in print- and web-based information for applicants.
Timeline: To be completed 12/04

6. **Provide clear, comparable descriptions of campus selection process.** These will allow applicants and their families to understand similarities and differences in how each campus reviews applications, what criteria are used and how each criteria are judged (i.e., how does each campus calculate and weigh a student's GPA? What role does low family income play in admission?). OP will create a template for campuses to follow to enhance comparability.
Timeline: To be posted to web by 7/04 and incorporated into printed *ITU* by 1/05

Goal: Accessibility

1. **Evaluate information sources.** Use planned focus groups and recent strategic communication surveys to assess where parents and students are getting their admissions information and how accurate they consider that information to be. Include systemwide, campus and public sources.
Timeline: To be completed 4/04

2. **Centralize admissions information on web.** We are in the process of reorganizing OP's web-based admissions information under one systemwide site (www.universityofcalifornia.edu) to create a consistent place for parents and students to go for the latest admissions and policy information. Reciprocal links to and from related campus sites will be included.

Timeline: To be completed 9/04

3. **Disseminate information through counselor conferences.** Statewide counselor conferences offer a primary venue to promote the online application, describe the new paths to UC admission and illustrate how campuses use comprehensive review.

Timeline: Conferences convene in 4/04 and 9/04; will be promoted in *UC Notes* and media in month before each event.

4. **Create new web resources for broader audience.** A central informational site aimed at teachers, coaches, and community leaders can quickly educate them on the admissions basics, connect them to the online application tour, to general publications, and to specially designed one-page pieces at strategic times in the application cycle that they can print and distribute at family nights and to promising students.

Timeline: To be completed by 9/04; promote through community and professional associations once launched

5. **Enhance bilingual information.** This year, bilingual brochures on admissions and financial aid were revamped and distributed via campuses, outreach programs, public schools and some community groups. Strategic communications has also expanded its Spanish-language cable TV and radio spots, initiated in 2001.

Timeline: Completed 9/03-11/03

Goal: Managing Expectations

1. **Assess parent/student expectations.** We plan to use focus groups to get a clearer picture of what parents and students expect when they apply to UC, and where they see the process as fair or unfair, given the rapid change in admissions policies in the last three years. This assessment will help us target our information to address their concerns.

Timeline: Focus groups to be convened 3/04

2. **Revamp freshman profiles.** The freshman profiles provided in *Introducing the University* display the ranges of GPAs and SAT scores of students who are admitted to each campus the previous year. Following recommendations from a BOARS subcommittee, these profiles will be expanded to include other quantifiable academic and nonacademic factors considered in comprehensive review, such as average number of A-G courses and honors courses, low income and the admit rate of ELC participants. More expansive changes are being considered, but because of printing deadlines, will not be included in the next edition.

Timeline: Initial redesign to be completed 3/04

3. **Convey more strongly the values of comprehensive review.** All descriptions of comprehensive review should reinforce the values UC is upholding by choosing students from across the applicant pool, and trying to create vibrant learning communities where students can get the best possible educational experience. This should convey the campuses' efforts to match students with their best opportunities – to admit students not just on merit, but on merit with respect to available slots in different programs. These messages will be included in all relevant print and web-based information, and reinforced through conferences and individual outreach contacts.

Timeline: Messages to be drafted and circulated among campuses by 4/04

4. **Emphasize college choices.** All communications on selecting a campus should emphasize the importance of each student finding the best match for their interests, and should raise the profile of all UC campuses and the system as a whole. Efforts will be made in tandem with the long-term advocacy and branding efforts being coordinated by Strategic Communications.

Timeline: Strategy to be designed by 9/04

ADMISSIONS COMMUNICATIONS TIMELINE

| Quarter | Tasks |
|-------------|--|
| 9/03-12/03 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Redesign online application • Create 'virtual tour' of application • Train Counselor Conference presenters on online application, policy changes (Dual Admissions Program, testing requirements, etc.) • Survey Fall '04 applicants • Produce, distribute bilingual brochure for parents/students • Air Spanish-language radio PSAs/TV spots during application period • Produce, mail financial aid guide/ FAFSA tips to admitted students |
| 1/04-3/04 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Redesign <i>Introducing the University</i>, printed application form • Specify Fall '05 enhancements for online application • Hold focus groups (current/applying students, parents): evaluate information sources; assess expectations; test messages, new materials • Create communication plan for introducing new Guaranteed Transfer Option (GTO), phasing out DAP: includes common language for campus denial letters; new web sites for students to review admission options and learn about GTO; extensive communication with campuses, CCCs, high schools and media explaining changes and impact on current applicants • Promote Ensuring Transfer Success conferences • Notify prospective/current families of likely fee increases for Fall '05 |
| 4/04-6/04 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simplify descriptions of all eligibility rules for Fall '05 • Revamp freshman profiles to include additional factors considered in comprehensive review • Draft and circulate messages on values that underpin admissions • Conduct user testing of online application enhancements |
| 7/04-9/04 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide comparable descriptions of campus selection processes on web • Centralize, promote all admissions information on systemwide web site • Prep content and promote Fall '05 Counselor Conferences • Print, distribute Financing Guides (freshman/transfer/Spanish versions) |
| 10/04-12/04 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop common definitions of Comprehensive Review factors for Fall '06 cycle within 2004-05 academic year • Implement strategy to promote college choice, raise profiles of all UC campuses |