

**Remarks to the Board of Regents
on the Academic Senate Freshman Eligibility Proposal**

**President Mark G. Yudof
November 19, 2008**

As you all know, in July the Academic Senate presented a proposal for reforming UC's freshman eligibility standards. At the time I deferred action on the item because I felt its complexity demanded more time of all of us to study it, and because the results of the new CPEC eligibility study were not in at that time and were expected in the next few months.

We've in fact used the intervening period – and I may say we've used it a lot, with many, many hours of meetings – to explore the effects of the proposal more deeply and more cooperatively and closely with the Academic Senate and with the staff at the Office of the President. The new CPEC study hasn't been entirely unveiled yet, but we are able to use [data from] it; and of course, with Regent Island's leadership, the Committee on Educational Policy really did something quite extraordinary and held three special meetings to allow further discussion among the Regents and with those knowledgeable about the proposal.

My plan now is to bring the eligibility proposal to the Board for your action at our January meeting. We still have a little bit of work to do, but I believe the proposal has a number of strong features that will make it worthy of the Board's consideration in January.

I have to say it took me a long time to warm up to this proposal, in part because I rarely endorse something I don't understand, unless one of my children makes me. But the more I learned about this proposal, the more strengths I thought it had.

So, first, let me just mention the reasons for the support. I believe it will produce a freshman class that is just as qualified as in the past, including by traditional indicators of achievement, by which I mean SAT scores and GPAs and things of that sort. Our projections show, and we can't be exact, but there probably is not 1/100 of a point difference between what is proposed by the Senate and what will occur – remember, three years out – in 2011 [when students apply for fall 2012 admission]. We think it will produce a class prepared to meet the rigors of a UC education and go on to meet the workforce and other needs of California.

Second, the proposal increases opportunity for students by expanding the number of applications to be reviewed by UC campuses. The comprehensive review process that campuses will employ will send a clear message to California high school students that if they complete a reasonable course of preparation for college and do well, their qualifications will be thoroughly evaluated by the University of California, pursuant to a comprehensive review policy. I think this will be viewed by students and parents as a fairer approach than a more mechanical approach that doesn't look to the whole student, doesn't look to their life experiences, but is too mechanical in using the quantifiable numbers that are in every application.

Third, the proposal eliminates the requirement for two SAT Subject Tests, and that's a requirement that has the effect of excluding from UC consideration many otherwise high-achieving students who simply have not taken these tests, which are not required by nearly anyone else around the country – and which are an additional cost for the students, and an additional, obviously, commitment of time and energy for the students.

We hope that the proposal expands opportunity for traditionally underrepresented groups, though the specific outcomes are hard to predict. We can predict the size of the pool and roughly the qualifications, but there is an admissions process, and then there's the question of where the students choose to go to the University, and so it is not the easiest thing in the world to get a precise breakdown by ethnicity and so forth. But we do see some encouraging numbers in the pool, though not revolutionary numbers. Obviously, we expect our campuses will use processes that fully comport with Proposition 209. That is the law of the land.

So I will recommend that the Regents approve the faculty proposal, making only one change, a change that I believe will strengthen the proposal, and that is to move the minimum GPA for consideration from the 2.8 unweighted in the original recommendation – this is for the “under review” category – to a weighed 3.0. Mathematically, there's very little difference between the two. But it's a balancing process here, and I thought, in my conversations and in listening to what people had to say, that there was too much of a perception that by having a 2.8 we were lowering our standards. And requiring a B average seems to me a perfectly sensible way to project ourselves to the world. It doesn't have that much of an impact on the total number of applications, and we wanted to avoid the appearance that UC does not encourage schools to offer, and students to take, rigorous courses including honors courses.

Obviously we're sensitive to a concern raised in the Senate that the use of a weighted GPA may place an undue burden on students from schools that offer few or no honors-level courses, and we have to address that frontally. This is a phenomenon that is primarily a small school/large school issue, to some extent a rural/urban type of issue; it's not a sort of racially impacted/non-racially impacted school issue. I've asked my staff and the Senate to continue to study this question of access to a-g and honors-level courses and what community colleges in the rural areas offer. But on balance, my conclusion was it is better to stick with a B average and to encourage students to take honors courses than, frankly, discourage them from doing so by not counting it at all, in which case a student may rationally say, “I simply won't take the honors course; it's harder, even though it prepares me better for college, because I want to maximize my GPA.”

There is no perfect admissions system. This is a recommendation I'm going to make. I think it balances the different interests very well.

Because the Senate proposal moves the admission guarantee from 12½ percent of the statewide public high school graduating class to 10 percent – which it does, even though we greatly expand the number of students that will be considered for admission, so on the whole the proposal opens it up a great deal – I believe we need to consult with our Master Plan partners at CSU, the community colleges, and of course, in Sacramento, with the State Superintendent, and elsewhere. We've done a great deal of research on this. A number of Regents had raised the point, is this a

violation of the Master Plan? Well, the Master Plan is apparently found in many places, only a portion of it in the statute. I reached the conclusion that there is no legal or statutory bar – I think the General Counsel would support this – but that good faith requires that we consult with, again, Cal State and the community colleges, and the Governor’s Office, and the Speaker’s Office, and so on down the line. I will undertake with my staff those consultations between now and January, and then we’ll make a recommendation to you at your January meeting. I should add, I think the Senate did have extensive consultations, but I just want to do this exactly right. I don’t want anyone to say that they didn’t have a shot at critiquing or commenting on this particular proposal.

Another point about this that I want to make, and I’ll be getting back to this: Freshman admission is only part of the story. Fully one-third of our graduates begin their college careers in community colleges, and we need to strengthen the community college path to the University of California. The framers of the Master Plan saw a robust transfer function as a key to both access and affordability for students. One of my highest priorities is to improve the transfer rates, and this is apart from whatever we achieve through the new eligibility proposal. We should view the freshman eligibility proposal as one major piece of the entire access issue. Another major piece is how we deal with our relationships with community colleges and the students there. I have some ongoing discussions with the chancellors and with others, and we will come back to you with some recommendations about how to achieve better transfer rates.