



Proposed Revisions to UC Eligibility

The Academic Senate of the University of California is proposing revisions to UC's freshman eligibility criteria. These revisions are intended to keep UC's requirements aligned with the California Master Plan for Higher Education provision that UC offer eligibility to the top 12.5 percent of California's graduating public high school students.

The faculty's Board of Admissions and Relations with Schools (BOARS), Academic Council, and Representative Assembly of the Academic Senate have adopted the proposal described below. It next goes to the UC Board of Regents for consideration. The proposal is designed to emphasize high academic achievement, keep UC aligned with the Master Plan, avoid a disproportionate impact on any single group, and avoid precipitous changes for future UC applicants.

What eligibility is

"Eligibility" refers to the basic academic requirements needed for admission to the UC system. UC's *statewide* freshman eligibility criteria include: (1) completion of the "a-g" pattern of college-preparatory courses in high school; (2) the grade point average (GPA) achieved in those courses in the 10th and 11th grades; and (3) scores on standardized tests, including the SAT I or ACT plus three SAT II subject tests. An "Eligibility Index" defines the combination of these grades and test scores required for UC eligibility. Students also can become UC-eligible by being in the top 4 percent of the class *in their own school*, based on their grades in the a-g courses; this process is known as "Eligibility in the Local Context" (ELC).

Historically, achieving eligibility has meant a guaranteed spot at one of UC's campuses, though not necessarily the campus of choice. Campuses select their incoming students from among the eligible applicants, using a process called "comprehensive review" that considers multiple indicators, both quantitative and qualitative, of academic and personal achievement.

Need for revisions

Every few years, the California Postsecondary Education Commission (CPEC) conducts a study to assess where UC stands in relation to the 12.5 percent Master Plan target. In May 2004, CPEC issued a new report estimating that, in the class of 2003, 14.4 percent of the graduating class had achieved UC's eligibility requirements, up from 11.1 percent in 1996.

After CPEC eligibility reports are issued, the UC faculty proposes adjustments to bring the University's criteria back into line with the Master Plan target. The University believes that all students in the current eligibility pool are highly qualified and would benefit from a UC education; at the same time, UC is obliged to conform its practices to current state policy.

The faculty proposal

Several months ago, in anticipation of the CPEC report, BOARS began reviewing the University's eligibility criteria and developing principles to guide the adjustment of those criteria. As a result, the Senate has made the following proposal:

1. Ensure GPA is calculated in a manner reflecting performance in all a-g courses in the 10th and 11th grades. (For students who take more than the minimum number of required a-g courses, the University's official method of calculating GPA for eligibility purposes reflects only the *best* combination of grades a student achieved in a given subject. However, students are advised to estimate their own GPA using all a-g courses taken; campuses use all a-g courses taken when they calculate GPA for purposes of selection; and ELC students already are evaluated for eligibility using all a-g courses taken. This proposal to reflect performance in all a-g courses for purposes of eligibility brings consistency to UC's practices.)

2. Require ELC students to complete UC's course and testing requirements in order to be considered eligible.

(Students who are notified that they are in the top 4 percent of their school currently are required to complete the statewide course and test requirements before they *enroll* at UC. The proposal here would not consider them *eligible* until they do so. This would not change requirements for ELC students, only the timing of when they become officially eligible.)

3. Increase minimum GPA required for UC eligibility from 2.8 to 3.1. (This change would not take effect for 2 years. This new minimum GPA might be slightly different from 3.1 and would be determined only after analysis of student results from new standardized tests that will be introduced for the Fall 2006 entering class.)

4. Finally, adjust the Eligibility Index as needed to bring UC's eligibility rate to 12.5 percent. (This means that, once the above adjustments are taken into consideration, the "sliding scale" of grades and test scores required for UC eligibility would be adjusted upward as much or as little as necessary in order to achieve the 12.5 percent target eligibility rate.)

The Senate also recommends that further research be conducted into the potential effects of expanding the ELC (4 percent) program to some larger percentage, given the academic quality and breadth of student representation the program fosters.

What the faculty considered

BOARS reviewed a variety of scenarios for adjusting eligibility before settling on the current proposal. The faculty were guided first and foremost by a desire to continue admitting an entering class of high academic accomplishment, and one that includes high-achieving students from all parts of the state and all walks of life.

The Senate proposal relies principally on adjustments in GPA to achieve the Master Plan eligibility level, rather than increasing the minimum test score requirement. This is because simulations showed that adjustments to GPA were the most effective way to increase the expected academic performance of students at UC and had the least negative impact on populations that are underserved at UC, including educationally disadvantaged students and underrepresented minorities.

Two-step implementation timeline

The Senate proposes to make process-oriented adjustments (#1 and #2 above) quickly, and these adjustments are estimated to bring UC's eligibility level to roughly 13 percent. The other changes (#3 and #4 above) would take effect later, both to provide adequate notice to students and schools of the increased minimum GPA requirement and to reflect the fact that new standardized tests will be introduced for Fall 2006, and UC's Eligibility Index should reflect those new tests. The proposal is:

Fall 2005 entering class: Changes in calculation of GPA and determination of ELC eligibility take effect.

Fall 2007 entering class: Increase in minimum GPA takes effect, and Eligibility Index is adjusted to complete the movement back to the 12.5 percent target, based on student performance information from the new standardized tests.

Questions and answers

Q. What is the impact on students?

A. Students will need to continue taking challenging courses in high school and doing well in them. The proposed changes will, by necessity, make some students ineligible for UC, but there should be sufficient notice of the changes. The GPA calculation change proposed for Fall 2005 is already consistent with what UC tells students to do when estimating their own GPA. And the adjustments to the minimum GPA and to the Eligibility Index would not take effect until Fall 2007.

Q. What effect would these changes have on the demographic composition of the UC-eligible pool?

A. BOARS looked at the impact on applicants by race/ethnicity, by high school API quintile (school ranking on the state's Academic Performance Index), by rural/suburban/urban location, and by schools with high numbers of free-lunch students, English language learners, and first-generation college-goers. Because eligibility is being tightened, the number of students eligible in all groups will be reduced. However, the impact is estimated *not* to fall disproportionately on any one group.