

University of California Academic Senate

Fact Sheet on Proposal for New Freshman Eligibility Policy

June 11, 2008

The Assembly of the Academic Senate has recommended that UC modify its current freshman eligibility policy. This recommendation will be transmitted to the President and The Regents for consideration at the July Regents' meeting. If approved by The Regents, implementation of the new policy is proposed to be effective for Fall 2012 admissions.

Current policy

At present, freshman applicants are eligible for admission to the UC system if they:

- complete 15 UC-approved college-prep courses (the “a-g” courses);
- take the SAT or ACT plus Writing, and two SAT Subject Tests; and
- earn the required combination of GPA and test scores specified in the University’s Eligibility Index.

Students who meet these criteria are deemed to represent the top one-eighth of California public high school graduates, and receive a referral guarantee – if no campus to which they applied admits them, eligible students are guaranteed that their applications will be referred to a campus with remaining enrollment space and they will be admitted there. Most campuses cannot admit all eligible applicants due to space limitations. “Eligible” students are also guaranteed a full, comprehensive review of their applications. Selective campuses base their admission decisions on a comprehensive review of each application, in which multiple criteria are used to assess both the full range of the applicant's achievements, in the context in which those achievements occurred.

Proposed changes

Under the policy changes:

- No SAT Subject Tests would be required. Students can still submit Subject Test scores if they believe the scores help make their cases for admission; and, as now, campuses and majors can still recommend the submission of particular Subject test scores. The ACT (with writing exam) or the SAT core exam would still be required.
- All high school graduates achieving certain basic parameters of college-readiness, described below, would be “Entitled to a Review” (ETR). These students would be invited to apply to UC, with the promise that their qualifications will be fully evaluated, via comprehensive review, at each campus to which they apply.
- ETR students who also fall within the top 9%, as determined by UC, of their high-school graduating class, or who fall within the top 9% statewide by a GPA/test-score index, would additionally be guaranteed admission via referral, in the manner that eligible students are currently. These 9% x 9% criteria will identify approximately 10% of California's graduating seniors.

Rationale for proposing these changes

“We don’t want the lack of one test or one course to make excellent students invisible to UC,” says Board of Admissions and Relations with Schools (BOARS) Chair Mark Rashid. “By inviting a broader pool of prospective students to apply and be evaluated under comprehensive review, campuses can make a better and more fair determination of academic merit by looking at all of the student’s achievements in the context of their particular schools and personal circumstances. This is what our selective campuses do now when they choose among eligible students; every applicant should get the same opportunity.”

- UC's current method of identifying the top one-eighth of high school graduates hinges primarily on coursework and test participation, rather than on the grades and test scores they earn. As a result, the notion of “eligibility” does not necessarily always mean “qualified”. BOARS argues persuasively that, under current policy, what limits eligibility to many is not academic performance.
- Indeed, what often prevents UC eligibility turns out to be failure to successfully navigate UC’s course-taking and test-taking rules, some of which are complex and arcane. Many high-achieving California students fail to be eligible for technical reasons that have little bearing on their actual merit. Some of these deserving students even apply to UC, only to be denied admission, or even consideration, because of trifling variances from the rules of eligibility.
- Campuses can more accurately and fairly identify a limited portion of the top one-eighth of students by reviewing all of the information in the application, and by considering applicants’ accomplishments in the context of their educational opportunities and personal circumstances – just as they do now when they select among eligible students.
- Whereas about one-third of California high school students take the SAT Reasoning test, far fewer – many high-achieving students among them – take the UC-required SAT Subject Tests (previously called “SAT II” tests) because they are unaware of UC’s requirements or for other significant reasons. Eliminating the SAT Subject Test requirement would broaden the pool of applicants, enabling campuses to select students who are academically strong but who may have missed one or more Subject Tests.
 - Example: A 2003 CPEC study estimated that about 10,000 seniors completed the required “a-g” courses and SAT exam and graduated with a GPA of 3.5 or higher, but were ineligible for UC because they didn’t take the required SAT Subject tests.
- Data shows that, across the entire pool of UC freshmen, scores on the SAT Subject Tests contribute little, if anything, to justify requiring them of all students. UC’s ability to predict which students will do well at the University, after all other information in the application is taken into account, is virtually unaffected by dropping the requirement.
- The admission guarantee conferred by UC eligibility is a referral guarantee and does not apply to most UC campuses. Only campuses that elect or have the enrollment space to admit all UC eligible applicants honor the referral guarantee. UC-eligible students who are not admitted to any campus to which they apply are given the option of enrolling at a UC campus where space is available – in recent years, Riverside and Merced. Very few eligible students accept the option of admission to a campus to which they did not apply.
 - Example: In Fall 2006, less than 6% of students who were referred to campuses other than those they applied to accepted the admission offer.
- While the Academic Assembly’s proposal is aimed at encouraging a broader pool of applicants to apply UC, this policy change would not increase the number of students UC accepts. That number would continue to be determined each year by the capacity at each campus and the

enrollment funding negotiated with the state.

Details of the proposal

Under the proposal, applicants who meet certain basic criteria for college readiness would be “entitled to review” (ETR): that promised review would be the same full, comprehensive review that is now promised only to “UC eligible” students. To achieve the new ETR status, California-resident applicants would have to:

- Complete a prescribed 11 of the 15 currently required “a-g” courses by the end of the 11th grade;
- Achieve an unweighted GPA of 2.8 or higher in all “a-g” courses taken in the 10th and 11th grades, and
- Take and submit scores on the SAT Reasoning Test or ACT plus Writing.

Students’ scores on their submitted standardized test would not affect their ETR status, but could be used in the comprehensive review of their applications. Students also would still have the option of submitting SAT Subject Test scores – when applying to a highly quantitative major, for example. Admitted students would be expected to complete the full set of 15 required a-g courses prior to enrolling, or risk cancellation (although this would not be automatic).

Eligibility by Examination Alone would change under the proposed policy. All applicants who achieve very high scores on a prescribed battery of standardized tests – the SAT Reasoning Test or the ACT with Writing, plus two SAT Subject Tests in different areas – would be accorded ETR status, and their applications comprehensively reviewed. They would no longer be guaranteed admission.

Admission by Exception: Campuses would be allowed to admit competitive applicants who do not achieve ETR status as described above, consistent with the existing Admission by Exception policy. For example, if an otherwise strong applicant failed to complete the specific 11 a-g courses required for ETR status by the end of the 11th grade, a campus could still admit the student if the overall record of achievement is competitive with those of other applicants.