



Michael T. Brown
Telephone: (510) 987-0711
Fax: (510) 763-0309
Email: Michael.Brown@ucop.edu

*Chair of the Assembly and the Academic Council
Faculty Representative to the Board of Regents
University of California
1111 Franklin Street, 12th Floor
Oakland, California 94607-5200*

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MARK G. YUDOF, PRESIDENT, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, AND OF THE ASSEMBLY OF THE ACADEMIC SENATE

Re: Academic Assembly Passes the Academic Council's Modification of BOARS' Proposal to Reform UC's Freshman Eligibility Policy

Dear Mark:

At its June 11, 2008 meeting, the Academic Assembly, the legislative body of the Academic Senate, endorsed the Academic Council's modification of the Proposal to Reform UC's Freshman Eligibility Policy from the Board of Admissions and Relations with Schools (BOARS). This proposal, which the Academic Council had approved at its most recent two-day meeting on May 27th and 28th, recommends that UC: 1) Implement "Entitled to Review" (ETR) eligibility category and eliminate the Subject-exam requirement for Fall 2012 freshman admission; 2) For Fall 2012 admission, implement an initial, modified guarantee structure based on 9% within-school and 9% statewide criteria (yielding an approximate 9.7% guarantee rate overall); 3) Commit BOARS to annual and five-year evaluations and reporting of academic and fiscal impacts; and 4) Based on the results of these ongoing studies, BOARS should periodically consider recommending adjustments to the guarantee structure. The aims of ETR, a new pathway to eligibility, are to better identify the California high school graduates best prepared for the rigors of a UC education; to identify those students more fairly by better honoring achievement in the context of opportunity; to shift the emphasis toward actual educational achievement and away from satisfaction of a long list of bureaucratic rules and requirements; and to send a stronger message to students and schools about appropriate college preparation.

During the last two year's The Regents have been apprised that an admissions initiative has been in development, and at the May Regents' Meeting members were led to expect the Senate's proposal in time for their July meeting. In my capacity as the Chair of the Assembly and the Academic Council, and in light of the Regents' expectation, I forward this proposal to you, in both your capacity as the President of the University and President of the Assembly of the Academic Senate, for conveyance to The Regents for consideration at their July 2008 meeting. This proposal comes to you after considerable and thoughtful review by the Senate's agencies. It benefited from two systemwide Senate reviews, multiple revisions, as well as substantial deliberation twice by the Academic Council. Council's modification of BOARS' proposal enjoyed considerable support within the

Academic Assembly, passing with a vote of 38 members in favor and 12 members against. It was clear that members of the Academic Council and the Academic Assembly were impressed with the quality of the proposal and the strength of its supporting logic and analysis. In the end, the strength of the vote showed that the faculty believes this innovative proposal serves the cause of academic excellence, procedural fairness, and diversity (see enclosure).

The Academic Senate makes this recommendation to The Regents in accordance with its authority under Regents Standing orders. Specifically, The Regents have delegated authority to the Academic Senate over admissions per Regental [Standing Order 105.2\(a\)](#), 'Duties, Powers, and Privileges of the Academic Senate,' which states: *"The Academic Senate, subject to the approval of the Board, shall determine the conditions for admission, for certificates, and for degrees other than honorary degrees. It shall recommend to the President all candidates for degrees in course and shall be consulted through committees appointed in such manner as the President may determine in connection with the award of all honorary degrees."* This authority was specifically reaffirmed by action of The Regents to approve RE-28, the resolution rescinding SP-1, a resolution that prohibited the consideration of race, religion, sex, color, ethnicity, or national origin as criteria for admission to the University or to any program of study: *"In keeping with longstanding Regents' policy, The Regents reaffirm that the Academic Senate shall determine the conditions for admission to the University, subject to the approval of The Regents, as provided in Standing Order 105.2."*

The Regents have delegated the responsibility of determining the conditions of admission to the Academic Senate because they expect admissions policy to be grounded in sound educational philosophy, analytical data, and logical reasoning of the highest order. With respect to this proposal, I can attest that the Senate has operated in a manner worthy of that responsibility and trust. For your convenience and reference, I have enclosed the complete proposal, the background information, and the justification for the proposed Regents' Item regarding the Proposal to Reform UC's Freshman Eligibility Policy. If you have any questions, please let me know.

Respectfully submitted,



Michael T. Brown, Chair
Academic Senate

Copy: Academic Assembly
María Bertero-Barceló, Executive Director

Encl. 1

Regents Item: Proposal to Reform UC's Freshman Eligibility Policy (action)

Background

Under Regental guidelines, it is expected that admission to UC conform to the following principles:

1. UC admission should be awarded primarily on the basis of academic achievement during the pre-college years;
2. Assessment of this achievement should be based on multiple sources of evidence;
3. Assessment of achievement should account for circumstances in which it occurred; and
4. All of California's college-ready students, regardless of background, should be afforded the chance to have their qualifications fairly and accurately assessed for purposes of admission to UC.

Under current policy, freshman admission decisions at UC are made by the individual campuses, and are based on a comprehensive review of all information available on the application. Campuses generally select freshman admits from among their UC-eligible applicants. Currently, eligibility hinges on: a) taking a prescribed set of standardized admissions tests; b) successfully completing the list of courses known as the "a through g curriculum," consisting of 15 year-long college-preparatory courses certified by UC at each high school; and c) meeting an index based on GPA in the a-g courses and a composite test score. There also exists a "local context" pathway: students who are in the top 4% of their high school graduating class, and who have completed all UC required tests, are deemed eligible. It is important to note that nearly all such students also satisfy the statewide eligibility index. All eligible applicants are guaranteed admission to UC via a referral-pool mechanism, wherein eligible applicants who are not accepted by any campus to which they apply are referred for admission to campuses with remaining space. In recent years, only two campuses – Riverside and Merced – have extended offers of admission to students in the referral pool. The yield rate in the referral pool – i.e., the proportion of enrolling freshmen who take a referral offer of admission from UC – is typically in the 5-7% range. Less than 1% of UC freshmen come to UC via a referral offer.

The eligibility construct currently functions to limit the admitted pool of students in two main ways. First, through its public pronouncements, UC discourages applications from students who do not satisfy the eligibility criteria as outlined above. Notwithstanding this discouragement, every year about 15% of California-resident applicants are found to be ineligible, and the overwhelming majority of these (>90%) are denied at every campus to which they apply. Data show that there are thousands of applicants who have very strong records of academic achievement, but are found to be ineligible for technical reasons and are denied consideration for admission. Based on a 2004 CPEC study, 21,000 students would have been eligible had they merely taken the SAT Subject Tests required; 6,500 would have been eligible but for one course (likely Visual/Performing Arts or English).

There are long lists of rules and regulations governing UC eligibility. Ideally, students are supposed to be able to figure out for themselves if they are eligible, but the reality is different than that for many students. In a non-negligible number of cases, even UC campuses come up with different results when they evaluate eligibility. The rules are that complex. And, getting on the wrong side of any of those rules, even the arcane ones, makes a student ineligible. This is so even if it happened accidentally; even if it was the fault a student's school; and even if the thing that which made a student ineligible has no bearing on a student's academic merit. Indeed, what limits the eligible pool turns out to be compliance with all of UC's course-taking and test-taking rules. For example, failure to take the Subject tests that UC requires is a significant cause of ineligibility. UC awards guaranteed admission, via referral, to applicants not on the basis of superior academic performance, but on the basis of successful navigation of a complex set of rules and regulations. Far worse than making some less-than-excellent students eligible, UC basically summarily denies even excellent students because of trifling variances from the rules of eligibility. **The Assembly of the Academic Senate believes that UC's eligibility policy can better align with the above-stated principles of undergraduate admissions.**

The Proposed Policy

BOARS' proposed eligibility policy contains three interdependent elements. First, the SAT Subject test part of the required test pattern would be eliminated as a strict requirement for freshman admission. Individual colleges and majors would still be free to recommend submission of specific SAT Subject test scores, just as they are now. This recommendation was made on the basis of extensive analyses that showed that, after accounting for GPA and SAT core-exam scores, Subject test scores contribute very little to the accuracy of predictions of initial success at UC. Additionally, elimination of this requirement would broaden the pool of students who are visible to UC's admissions processes, and, at the same time, increase the quality of the top 12.5% pool as a whole. This somewhat counterintuitive phenomenon occurs because the qualifying GPA and SAT core exam scores, necessarily, would be raised significantly in order to delineate 12.5% of the state's high school graduates.

The second main element calls for introduction of a new category called Entitled to Review (ETR). ETR status hinges on completion of a prescribed 11 out of 15 a-g courses by the end of the 11th grade – just before students apply to UC – with a minimum GPA of 2.8 (without weighting for honors courses), and completion of either the SAT Reasoning test or ACT with its optional Writing component. Completion of the full a-g course pattern prior to graduation would remain an expectation, with failure to do so constituting grounds for cancellation of any admission offers. Students in this category would be entitled to a review at each UC campus to which they apply, but would not be guaranteed admission as a result of their ETR status.

The third element of BOARS' proposal involves guaranteed admission via the referral pool, which would apply to a subset of students satisfying the ETR criteria stated above. This third component was the subject of substantial revision following the Senate-wide review of the initial proposal, as described below.

Rationale for the Policy Change

Whereas UC eligibility is supposed to be awarded to the “top 12.5%” of California high school graduates on the basis of achievement, the current policy is conferring the guarantee largely on the basis of mere coursework taken and test participation. Conversely, thousands of California students, despite presenting strong records of academic achievement that far surpass the current eligibility standards, are ineligible for minor technical reasons. Nevertheless, thousands of these students apply to UC every year and are denied even a comprehensive review of their applications: students deemed ineligible, even very high achieving and deserving ones, currently receive neither a guarantee of admission nor a guarantee that their credentials will be reviewed – even after paying the application fee. BOARS has noted that the burden of this apparent inequity falls disproportionately on less-advantaged students.

Each year about 15% of the CA-resident applicant pool is found to be ineligible; over 90 percent of these students are denied admission. And some of these are very strong students. For example, for Fall 2007 admission, of the 11,000 ineligible applicants, 2200 of them had GPAs over 3.5. The average GPA for this group of ineligibles is actually higher than the average GPA of the fully-eligible cohort. As a group, they had exactly the same number of a-g courses – 47.3 semesters – as fully-eligible students. They had almost the same number of honors-level courses as the fully-eligible pool: 11.1 vs. 12.7. Nearly all of them – 97% – took the SAT Reasoning test, with an average score of 552 vs. 592 for the fully-eligible pool. More than half of them even took two SAT Subject tests, as required by UC. By any estimation, this is a strong pool of students. They are superior, even by the traditional academic measures, to minimally eligible students. A rational and fair policy would’ve found a place for these students. Yet UC denied admission and meaningful consideration to 89% of them. Why were they ineligible? Well, in some cases they didn’t take the required Subject tests, or at least the right ones. In others, they had some minor variance from the a-g curriculum. There is an infinite array of possible technical violations of eligibility. But they all add up to the same thing: no matter how good you are, if you’re ineligible you are most likely not getting into UC.

Many high achieving students are being excluded from UC. Their exclusion appears to be an unintended consequence of the current eligibility policy, on the basis of students being unable to navigate the complexities attending the a-g curriculum and test-pattern requirements. This “failure” could be due to factors having nothing to do with student ability (i.e., unavailability of UC-approved courses and honors courses, differences in school grading practices, improper advising, etc.). In addition, the GPA/test-score eligibility index sets a quite low standard of performance, with the minimum required GPA (3.0, weighted for honors courses) being significantly lower than the average GPA among all students who complete the a-g curriculum (approximately 3.45, per the 2003 CPEC eligibility study). The compensating test scores corresponding to this minimum GPA are actually below the relevant averages for all test-takers nationally. **In effect, the current eligibility construct guarantees admission to students who correctly comply with its many rules and requirements, while not ensuring an appropriately high level of academic mastery as indicated by grades and test scores.** This reality is reflected in the finding, based on CPEC’s 2003 eligibility study, that less than 0.5% of the state’s graduates satisfied the coursework and test-taking requirements, but missed eligibility because of failure to meet the GPA/test-score index.

BOARS argued persuasively that UC's unusual Subject-exam requirement should be eliminated as a strict condition of admission, because the scores have been found to be of negligible predictive value in the context of other available information on the application, and because the requirement represents an unnecessary barrier to access to UC. It should be noted that dropping this requirement, absent any other changes to the eligibility construct, would require raising the GPA/test score index considerably and, as a consequence, lead to severely negative consequences for the makeup of the applicant pool, as explained in the text of the BOARS' proposal. BOARS also argued convincingly that campuses can admit and attract many academically excellent students that are currently invisible to UC by applying their comprehensive review processes to broader pools of applicants. This also provides that all campuses should be afforded the ability to select their own students.

Trajectory of the Proposal

[BOARS' original Proposal to Reform UC's Freshman Eligibility Policy](#) was presented at the June 27, 2007, Academic Council meeting, where Council agreed to send out the proposal for systemwide Senate review the following fall. The proposal grew out of BOARS' work, especially since 2004, to understand the effects of the current Freshman Eligibility Policy on both academic excellence of the admitted class, as well as on equity in access to UC. BOARS was motivated by a desire that UC achieve greater excellence in its ability to determine superior academic readiness to study at the University, as well as greater fairness in that determination. The proposal went out for systemwide review August 31st, with a December 5th deadline for responses. The proposal in its initial form called for elimination of the SAT Subject test requirement and establishment of the Entitled to Review pathway as described above, along with retention of the existing Eligibility in the Local Context (ELC) program, whereby the top 4% of high school graduates from each participating school are guaranteed admission, via the referral pool, to a campus of UC's choosing.

In December 2007, the Academic Council reviewed the responses resulting from that systemwide review and requested that BOARS address Council's concerns ([see revised January 11, 2008 letter](#),). Most responding divisions/committees supported the goals of the proposal, even when taking issue with the proposed means by which those goals would be attained. Many divisions/committees agreed that there is room to improve UC's eligibility policy, even though more work will be needed to garner wide support of the BOARS proposal. Further, most divisions and agencies expressed support for removing unnecessary barriers to students being considered for admissions and for broadening the pool of students under admissions consideration. Under certain conditions, many divisions/agencies were supportive of dropping the SAT subject test requirement. Most divisions/committees expressed agreement that minor variances from the a-g coursework requirements should not be automatic grounds for ineligibility, particularly in cases where the overall record of a-g courses is strong.

Yet, some reviewing agencies expressed concern that increasing the number of applications requiring comprehensive review would impact the campuses in a number of ways. Divisions and committees listed a number of concerns, which included costs/resources, the public impact of the loss of the admission guarantee as it is presently constructed, implications of

comprehensive review, and the perception that the a-g requirements were being softened. BOARS was asked specifically by the Academic Council to: 1) provide additional justification and data; and 2) reconsider its initial proposal to retain only the 4% ELC program while otherwise replacing the admissions guarantee with “Entitlement To Review” (ETR).

[BOARS responded to the January Council letter](#), and at its February 27, 2008 meeting the Academic Council reviewed 1) the letter from BOARS indicating how they responded to Council’s concerns and 2) the revised proposal. At that meeting, Council endorsed sending the revised proposal out for systemwide Senate review. The revised proposal retained the Subject-exam and ETR provisions of the original proposal, while introducing a much more extensive admissions guarantee structure than was included in the original. In particular, a subset of students who are “entitled to review” would additionally be guaranteed admission to a campus of the University's choosing, via the existing referral-pool mechanism, by meeting criteria that place them in either the top 5% statewide among graduating high school seniors, or in the top 12.5% of graduates from their school. BOARS argued that the chosen guarantee structure yielded expected UC performance data that was better than under the current eligibility rubric and was optimal in terms of student quality and student diversity. Moreover, the proposed guarantee structure captured approximately 10% of California’s graduates, enabling an important proportion of the eligibility pool to be determined on the basis of multiple indices of merit assessed in the context of opportunity. This referral guarantee provision was new in the revised proposal, and was intended to be responsive to the desire, expressed by many Senate agencies in the first review, to retain a more robust guarantee structure than simply the 4% ELC program.

In May 2008, the Academic Senate completed its systemwide review of BOARS’ ‘Revised Proposal to Reform UC’s Freshman Eligibility Policy.’

In aggregate, [Senate agency responses](#) to the revised proposal indicated strong support for two of the three main elements of the proposal: the ETR admission pathway and elimination of the Subject tests as a strict requirement. Also, there was strong support among Senate agencies for the intent of the BOARS revised proposal: to seek the best talent and to broadly represent the state of California, as well as to allow every campus to exercise their authority, through their own comprehensive-review-based selection processes, in determining UC-readiness. It was thought that the revised proposal can help campuses "... search intelligently for good students" and will give campuses that are not currently "selective" the chance to better manage the quality of their undergraduate student bodies. There was also near-uniform support for making the SAT Subject exam requirement non-mandatory, and strong support for the new entitled to review (ETR) construct. Moreover, there was support for the expansion of the admission guarantee over the original proposal, this being the main change in the revised proposal. Many reviewing agencies did, or could with an evaluation regiment, endorse the proposed guarantee structure but a significant minority expressed concerns about the specific indices of the recommended guarantee structure, namely, the 12.5% within-school and 5% statewide criteria: concerns were expressed about the effect of greatly expanding the within-school admissions guarantee from its current 4% level. The proposal was seen as strengthening UC’s presence in each of the State’s schools and promote a diverse demographic profile in those guaranteed a referral.

During the May 27-28th meeting of the Academic Council, the merits of the revised BOARS proposal were extensively discussed. After that discussion, the following motion was moved and seconded:

1. Implement ETR and eliminate the Subject-exam requirement for Fall 2012 freshman admission;
2. For Fall 2012 admission, implement an initial, modified guarantee structure based on 9% within-school and 9% statewide criteria (yielding an approximately 9.7% guarantee rate overall);
3. Commit BOARS to annual and five-year evaluations and reporting of academic and fiscal impacts; and
4. Based on the results of these ongoing studies, BOARS should periodically consider recommending adjustments to the guarantee structure.

Potential modifications of this proposal were discussed and debated but, in the end, the motion carried on a 12-7-0 vote. In the discussion, it was noted that, in the presence of the ETR pathway, the specifics of the guarantee criteria, whether 12.5% within-school and 5% statewide, or 9% by 9%, are greatly diminished in importance in comparison to the present policy. Though many Council members were persuaded that the guarantee structure proposed by BOARS was justified on the basis of key policy objectives (stated above), Council opted for caution and adopted the compromise position due to the lack of data on the effects of the proposal upon implementation. Thus, Academic Council noted that further changes to the guarantee criteria should be made only after a full study of the most current data is made.

After discussion and debate the Academic Assembly endorsed the Academic Council's recommendation by a vote of 38 to 12.

ACTION REQUESTED: **The Assembly of the Academic Senate, in accordance with Regents [Standing Orders 105.2\(a\)](#), (“*The Academic Senate, subject to the approval of the Board, shall determine the conditions for admission, ...*”) requests that The Regents of the University of California endorse the recommendation as noted below:**

1. **Implement ETR and eliminate the Subject-exam requirement for Fall 2012 freshman admission;**
2. **For Fall 2012 admission, implement an initial, modified guarantee structure based on 9% within-school and 9% statewide criteria (yielding an approximately 9.7% guarantee rate overall);**
3. **Commit BOARS to annual and five-year evaluations and reporting of academic and fiscal impacts; and**
4. **Based on the results of these ongoing studies, BOARS should periodically consider recommending adjustments to the guarantee structure.**