

Faculty Representative Dan Hare
Remarks to the Board of Regents on Admissions Policies
May 11, 2016

Thank you Chair Lozano. Today, I would like to focus upon the freshman admissions policies and practices of the University of California and to respond on behalf of the faculty to allegations made by the State auditor about how faculty changed admissions criteria and supposedly disadvantaged resident applicants. The auditor confused the public by presenting information in a way to make it appear the University of California accepted 16,000 nonresident students that had lower qualifications than residents. In fact the auditor's data showed 55,714 nonresident admits were above the median while 15,949 were below the median of California residents. The median is the midpoint, so we see the nonresidents were considerably stronger than the resident admits. The auditors also based their assertion using an analysis of Grade Point Average and standardized test scores of the students. It is important to recall that, per Regents Policy, the University of California does not evaluate applicants for admission on simple quantitative metrics like GPA and standardized test scores. Recognizing that GPA or standardized test scores provide an incomplete assessment of students' qualifications for admission to the University of California, the Regents agreed in 2001, in Regents Policy 2104, that admissions decisions would be based upon "comprehensive review," that is, a more complete assessment of students including ranking in their high school class, the quality of a student's senior year program, particularly in relation to the educational opportunities available in their high school, improvement in academic performance over time, academic accomplishments in light of the students experiences and special circumstances, and special achievement. Comprehensive Review has become the norm for other highly selective public and private universities. This approach was further improved through Regents Policy 2108 instituting single-score holistic review, adopted in 2011,. In particular, these Regents policies take into account the obvious variation in the quality and opportunities available at different high schools for students to obtain the education that would qualify them for admission to UC and serve not to penalize applicants from schools providing fewer opportunities.

A consequence of moving to holistic review has been an increase in the diversity of our student population, as you might have hoped and expected. The auditor acknowledges this as well. But, the auditors freely admitted that they could not evaluate admissions either on holistic review or any of the components of holistic review except GPA and standardized test scores. By focusing only on these two components of the admissions process, then the auditor did a disservice to UC by mischaracterizing the University's admissions practices.

The 1960 Master Plan for California Higher Education mandated that UC select freshmen from the top 12.5 percent of all California public high school graduates. For 55 years, UC has met that standard. For example, over the past several years, UC has admitted more than 12.5% of all California public high school graduates, up to 14% in 2014, and more students than were funded by the State of California. In short, the minimum admissions practice for UC is to admit up to 12.5% of the California public high school graduates, contingent upon the State providing its share of funding for those students. Now let's turn to the admissions for nonresidents.

Although decisions about the admissions of nonresidents are made using the same process as for residents, the admission of nonresidents is independent of the admission of residents. For the past five years, UC has been guided by a policy that requires that admitted applicants from outside the state “compare favorably” to admitted resident students at the campus level. This policy was a logical extension to earlier policy changes for holistic review that made for a fairer review process. An earlier expectation that nonresidents should meet some minimum numerical standard Systemwide is no longer relevant under comprehensive review.

The auditors claimed that the adoption of the “compare favorably” criterion was an action by the faculty to lower its admission standards for nonresidents purely to bring in more money to UC. But the data on admitted students and their performance at UC demonstrate that nonresident students, on average, are stronger and not of lower quality. The audit also implies that the 16,000 nonresident admits might have been replaced by 16,000 stronger California students who might have been admitted. This is also not true. The reason that those resident applicants weren't admitted is because they were not the top applicants and the State did not provide the funding for them. For the auditor to claim that it was the faculty, by lowering the admissions standards for nonresidents, who were responsible for these 16,000 residents not being admitted, is flat out false.

Let's return to what the auditor seems to suggest—that UC should return to determining admissibility of residents and nonresidents only by GPA and standardized test scores. To do so would greatly simplify the admissions process. It also would undo many of the gains in increasing the diversity of our undergraduate students that have been achieved over the past 15 or more years by using broader criteria, as per existing Regents policy. To return to admissions based upon only upon numerical criteria would disadvantage students who could not pay for coaching to do well on standardized exams, for example. The faculty will argue that this is not in the best interests of the State of California, and any change away from current admissions policies should be opposed.

The faculty are very much aware of the high demand for a UC education among the high school students of California, but we all must recognize that being in the top 12.5% of all California high school students is a high standard to meet. Seven of eight California public high school students simply will not be offered admission. We all wish that we could offer admission to a larger fraction of students, but that only can be done if the State is prepared to provide the funding to do so. In closing I would also like to thank President Napolitano and the UCOP staff for their report, Straight Talk on Hot Button Issues, which I recommend to you because it clarifies many of the issues related to admission in the Auditor's report.

Chair Lozano, that concludes my remarks.