



BOARD OF ADMISSIONS AND RELATIONS WITH SCHOOLS (BOARS)

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HENRY POWELL, CHAIR
ACADEMIC COUNCIL

Re: BOARS Recommendations for President Yudof on Comprehensive Review and Holistic Admissions

Dear Harry,

In March, President Yudof wrote to the Senate asking for help in “implementing holistic review to admit students at all [UC] campuses that have more qualified applicants than they can accept.” Subsequently in April, the President met with the Board of Admissions and Relations with Schools to discuss and clarify his goals and objectives. He noted concern about recent incidents of intolerance on UC campuses and how low admissions and enrollments for underrepresented minorities on some campuses may be contributing to an unwelcoming and isolating climate. He restated his support for the eligibility reform policy taking effect in 2012 and his desire for that policy to be successful. He asked BOARS to clarify the difference between comprehensive and holistic review, as well as our opinion about measures that would improve selection processes and meet his broad goals. Specifically, he asked BOARS to consider policy revisions that would require campuses to adopt more consistent admissions processes, including best practices based in holistic review on the most selective campuses, and to recommend possible changes to ensure that “each of our campuses has in place an admissions system that fully comprehends the complex challenges that many of our students face and evaluates these students equitably.” We are pleased to offer the President our response and implementation recommendations grounded in a new report on Comprehensive Review in Freshman Admissions at the University of California, 2003-2009¹.

BOARS shares the President’s concerns about campus climate, diversity, and fairness, and his goal of optimizing the impact of the eligibility reform policy. BOARS is committed to ensuring an equitable admissions system that recognizes a broad range of talent, and to campus processes that will be sensitive to the circumstances of the thousands of new students that will apply to UC campuses under the new policy.

¹ http://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/senate/reports/HP_MGYreBOARS_CR_rpt.pdf

In reviewing criteria and principles that constitute the UC Guidelines for Comprehensive Review², we found that the existing guidelines continue to be an excellent foundation for meeting the Regents goal to “seek out and enroll, on each of its campuses, a student body that demonstrates high academic achievement and exceptional personal talent and that encompasses the broad diversity of backgrounds characteristic of California.” We also found that campuses are taking steps to accommodate the more diverse pool under the new policy, and to evaluate students in the context of opportunity as they become more selective.

BOARS’ analysis of Comprehensive Review at the nine undergraduate campuses for the period 2003 to 2009 resulted in recommendations (see attached) and findings regarding best practices in place across the system. Several goals motivate these recommendations: (1) Improving undergraduate admission review and selection processes to better meet established Comprehensive Review Guidelines in preparation for 2012 admissions; (2) Promoting, where appropriate, more cross-campus sharing of review information and approaches; and (3) Providing more guidance in selection and clarity about the process. Finally, and above all, we seek to maximize the pursuit of “inclusive excellence,” in accordance with the Regents goals and the intent the new eligibility policy.

Comprehensive vs. Holistic Review

In practice, Comprehensive Review has three main elements: the use of multiple criteria to define merit; the evaluation of achievement in the context of the opportunities available to the applicant; and an individualized review of the file by trained evaluators. Each campus admissions committee has established a process in accordance with the Comprehensive Review principles, but practices vary in terms of how campuses implement each of these main elements. In addition, two campuses use a “holistic” scoring system that has the individualized review as the centerpiece, in which readers arrive at a single rating score after studying the entire file. Four campuses use a two stage, multiple score rating system that involves points and weights computed from quantitative indicators, and also a score derived from an evaluator’s read of the student file regarding personal accomplishments and circumstances. These multiple scores are weighed differently in selection across the four campuses. Finally, three campuses that admit the majority of applicants use a “fixed weight” method or index along with human evaluators to review applicants on the border of admissibility or eligibility. Thus, the terms *comprehensive review* and *holistic review* should not be equated, as single score holistic review is one only one method of comprehensive review.

BOARS’ Recommendations

- 1. All campuses should begin to use electronic data on students’ schools, personal circumstances, and performance relative to peers more systematically as they evaluate achievement in the context of opportunity.*

The President has stated that a “thorough individualized ‘full file review’” and use of the “wealth of data about students’ schools and personal circumstances and their performance relative to peers” that characterizes holistic review should be implemented on all campuses. We agree that these are important elements to include in all selection processes at UC. In fact, as a result of conversations with BOARS and admissions directors, the same data-driven factors used in holistic review processes are now available to all campuses electronically and will be part of a

² <http://www.ucop.edu/sas/adguides.html>

systemwide “read sheet” next year. Information about a students’ socioeconomic status, 28 indicators of high school resources and context of opportunity, and student performance relative to other applicants from the same high school, within the campus-specific applicant pool, and applicants from the school to UC is available to all campuses.

2. *As campuses become more selective, they should implement individualized review of all applicants.*

BOARS found that no applicant at any campus is currently denied admission without an individualized review of the file, in accordance with current Guidelines. Especially important to BOARS is the recommendation in the Comprehensive Review report to revise current Guidelines so that campuses incorporate an individualized review of all files to help distinguish between competitive applications, and weigh personal and academic accomplishments comparably along with information about the context of opportunity. If campuses use an individual read only to distinguish between applicants near the boundary of selection, then the potential of individualized review to identify excellence in the context of opportunity is diminished, and it could very well be that the boundary has been defined too narrowly.

Several other related good practices are worthy of adoption across the system, including practices that: Indicate no single factor determines admission and there are no test score cut offs, allowing multiple factors to determine “excellence” (single score holistic review); flagging of files and taking extra steps in supplemental review processes to consider unusual circumstances (holistic and some multi-score processes); review of files regardless of eligibility in order to make best use of Admission by Exception (holistic and more emphasis at fixed weight/supplemental read campuses); careful monitoring of readers and timely feedback to ensure a quality review (holistic and multi-score methods); and counterbalancing test scores with socioeconomic indicators or weighting of personal accomplishments comparably along with academic indicators (evident on two of the campuses). Revisions to the Comprehensive Review Guidelines will incorporate many of these practices.

3. *BOARS recommends that all selective campuses give serious consideration to using a holistic process, but notes that there are other best practices that have served some campuses well in terms of both improving academic indicators and admitting a more diverse student body.*

As the Comprehensive Review report shows, while holistic review has been successful in helping the most selective campuses meet UC’s goals, it is not the only way to achieve both academic excellence and a diverse student body. For example, UC Davis has a “fast-track” for ELC students and UC Santa Barbara has a School Pathway in admissions that gives preference to top-ranked students in a broad range of California high schools that works especially well with targeted recruitment efforts. The weighting of the multiple scores in those comprehensive review processes is also different, and appears to give more emphasis to personal accomplishments and socio-economic factors with good outcomes.

While we acknowledge that holistic review has many good elements, we need to address its limitations before we consider adopting it or any of its essential elements systemwide. First, the holistic review process is labor intensive and expensive. It requires training, payment to external readers, multiple reads of unusual cases, and constant oversight by experienced staff to ensure quality. All reviews must be completed within a short time frame for the campus to remain competitive for top applicants, and applicants and their families must be assured that they are receiving a quality review. Second, the single score method does not allow campuses to report

extraordinary talents, leadership, and achievements outside of academic criteria that reflect the many areas of excellence advanced by the University. Although multi-score methods show promise in identifying such personal accomplishment and talent, there currently is no common way of assessing and reporting these qualities. BOARS encourages campuses to consider factors beyond traditional academic criteria, yet we do not report those factors, which remains a chief limitation of the Comprehensive Review report. Third, the holistic method involves the norming of reader ratings (an essential element) and a series of practices that are not well-understood by those outside the process. This requires staff and faculty training to ensure that they are familiar with the nuances and decision points that differ from their current systems. Fourth, some contend that the holistic method is less transparent, because students do not have the ability to calculate their own scores in advance to assess their probability of admission. However, we find only one campus communicates points and weights to the public; all others provide more general information on campus websites about criteria evaluated in selection processes to help students prepare their application. Direct public involvement in review processes through the use of external readers also provides a remarkable level of transparency, but only to those willing to be trained and “certified” to review.

4. *BOARS recommends that, beginning in 2011, all campuses receive the holistic review scores of Berkeley and UCLA, and that campuses collaboratively devise a plan for the remaining applications to also receive a holistic score in order to begin to explore the use of a common rating system based on a shared read of all files*

To ensure that every applicant receives an individualized review according to the Comprehensive Review report recommendation, and to allow selective campuses to learn more about the holistic review process to facilitate decisions about its use, the system should optimize the use of overlapping applications across campuses. Because nearly 72% of UC applicants applied to either Berkeley or Los Angeles in 2010, it makes sense for those campuses to share their scores with other campuses. Both have offered to do so. In fact, UC Irvine currently is using UCLA scores to admit a portion of their applicant pool, and UCSD plans to use UCB and UCLA holistic scores next year to model a holistic process parallel to their current system. Several other campuses also anticipate changes that will improve their comprehensive review processes.

During the 2010-2011 year, BOARS will formulate a plan for training faculty and staff to derive normed holistic scores and how best to handle applicants who apply to local campuses but do not apply to UCB or UCLA. BOARS also will study ways to refine the Berkeley/UCLA scores in the lower ranges to ensure that campus-wide holistic scores are increasingly useful to other campuses with varying levels of selectivity. Campuses will receive these scores for each of their applicants and local committees will decide if and how they will use them in selection. To be clear, BOARS is not prescribing the use of a holistic system at any campus; however, we believe the availability of a common holistic score will help selective campuses consider using a holistic system in the future. Moreover, some campuses should anticipate this process may require additional reads of files for selection of admits according to local campus values. BOARS has identified good practices that can be adopted more widely across the system, including many embedded in the single score holistic method. We encourage campuses to continue to adopt successful strategies to identify talent among diverse populations in the state.

Of course, if a campus has a less successful admissions model and its principles and values remain the same after changing processes; its outcomes will be no different, regardless of the admissions process. BOARS asks faculty committees to become more involved to learn about the various stages of selection, and to take a more active role in oversight of the admissions

process. In some cases, faculty committees need to establish a basic philosophy that will clarify their values, guide selection, and ensure that their processes are consistent with the *Comprehensive Review Guidelines*. Without a guiding set of principles, there is no reason to expect that any change in admissions practice will yield better outcomes. Faculty committees have the flexibility to establish criteria for selecting students consistent with each campus' distinct mission, selectivity level, values, and goals for undergraduate education consistent with University-wide criteria.

Resource Implications

The extent to which the new admissions policy is successful will depend largely on increasing outreach and recruitment, particularly in urban school districts. Campuses will require more funding to support changes and a greater level of outreach to ensure the diversity of the applicant pool envisioned by the policy. Funding for new outreach initiatives is also crucial to ensuring that underrepresented students are prepared for UC. BOARS notes that specific campuses have launched special outreach efforts and have realized significant diversity gains.

The goal of implementing an individualized review of all applicants will require funding to ensure quality, even with the added efficiency of systemwide score sharing. Based on the expenses encountered by campuses that use holistic review, BOARS believes the \$60 application fee is sufficient only if a greater share of that fee is made available to the Admissions office at each campus. These increased fee-funded resources would be used to train and retain external readers and experienced staff to handle the increased volume of applications expected in 2012. Under the new flat tax funding streams model proposed by the administration, each campus will receive more of its own revenue from every application generated. Campus Chancellors should ensure that resources for campus outreach and admissions are adequate for effective outreach and a quality comprehensive review.

Finally, we face the specific challenge of uncertain and diminishing state support that will limit our capacity to continue to grow enrollment to meet the state's needs, at the same time that we expect to increase the number of students who can be reviewed comprehensively. It is more important than ever for UC to reaffirm its commitment to excellence that is inclusive of diversity.

Sincerely,



Sylvia Hurtado
BOARS Chair

cc: BOARS
Martha Winnacker, Senate Executive Director

Enclosure

Key Recommendations from *BOARS' Report on Comprehensive Review in Freshman Admissions at the University of California 2003-2009*

1. The 2002 Guidelines for Comprehensive Review stipulate that no applicant be denied admission without an individualized review; however, some campuses have used individualized review only at the border of denial. As all campuses become more selective, BOARS recommends that they implement individualized review of all applicants to ensure that the boundary is not defined by criteria that are too narrow.
2. Based on the reform of eligibility policy anticipated in 2012, we recommend that additional resources be provided to admissions offices to train and retain external readers and experienced staff, and to handle the increased volume of applications. Each office will need access to more of the funds from each application fee, and/or assistance in finding other sources of support. In addition, campuses should commit to making more of the admissions fee available to admissions offices to implement the other recommendations defined here. The Office of the President should investigate the current use of the application fees to support a quality review of students' files.
3. Standardized test scores and academic performance must be reviewed in the context of factors that impact test performance, including students' personal and academic circumstances (e.g. low-income status, access to honors courses, and the college-going culture of the school). Campuses should not employ test score "cut-offs" or grade point averages above 3.0 (the minimum score in the criteria for entitled to review) to disqualify students. Campuses should base an admission decision on the total information about achievement using multiple criteria in the applicant file.
4. The *Guidelines* should be updated to reflect admissions policy to be implemented in 2012. BOARS recommends several changes for the *Guidelines*, including changes to Principles 3 and 8 to assure that campuses review all files comprehensively. BOARS will submit a revision of Comprehensive Review Guidelines for Academic Senate approval based on the results of this report.
5. Four new principles to guide selection are recommended including: 1) Weighing academic accomplishments and personal achievements comparably in selection to identify students who strive for excellence in many areas, 2) Priority for ELC students in selection, 3) Evaluating standardized tests and academic indices in the context of other factors that affect performance, and 4) Steps taken to ensure the quality and integrity of the review process. These were identified through best practices employed in specific campus comprehensive review processes.
6. UC should document and report outstanding accomplishments of admitted students. Currently, there is no uniform way to aggregate the personal accomplishments and talents of admitted students in areas such as leadership, community service, and creative pursuits, the consideration of which is a hallmark of a University striving for excellence and the advancement of the public good. The Comprehensive Review processes should include the evaluation of these criteria, and in the interest of transparency, UC should disseminate this information to inspire other students with unique talents and commitments.
7. A distinctive feature of UC Comprehensive Review is the attention paid to students' achievements in the context of their high school. This feature is employed differently across

the campuses, but recent developments in central databases now allow campuses to consider school context factors more uniformly. Campuses should use this information in decision-making to assess students in the context of opportunity. As part of its ongoing work, BOARS will continue to clarify for campuses and the public what is meant by “*considering the context in which each student has demonstrated academic accomplishment*”.

8. BOARS will consider, in collaboration with the Admissions Processing Task Force, wider use of ratings and scores that capture many dimensions of talents among all applicants. Reader training across the system should be broadened to include and help readers identify criteria outside of the traditional academic indicators, including criteria listed in the holistic scoring systems at Berkeley and UCLA. A common scoring method can also be explored, along with simulation studies to identify whether it increases both excellence and diversity at every campus.
9. Although campuses will retain their autonomy in admissions decisions, more faculty guidance is needed in terms of principles to guide selection processes to ensure that campuses achieve excellence inclusive of diversity. Increased faculty involvement and oversight is also important through active participation on Senate committees charged with developing admissions policy.
10. Selective campuses should consider using a single-score holistic review process in selection, which relies on reader ratings that incorporate all information from the file. Some campuses that use Two-stage and Multiple Score review methods make variable use of ratings, presumably because they value criteria such as personal accomplishment and talents less in their processes.
11. Individual campuses should conduct disparate impact analyses to monitor the differential impacts of their admissions criteria, identify factors causing disparate impact, and implement intervention strategies to address the underrepresentation of specific populations in both the admitted and enrolled classes. It is important that campus intervention strategies and actions focus both on the next admission cycle as well as longer term interventions.
12. This report details a disturbing persistence of low African American admit rates across UC campuses, which now is affecting the educational climate. The University should invest in a new strategic outreach campaign to increase the identification, recruitment, and academic preparation of underrepresented students with the help of distinguished alumni, local communities, and schools. In addition, campuses should develop admission policies that place value on the importance of diversity to enhancing the learning environment as they prepare students to enter a diverse workforce. Finally, we recommend the formation of a new study group to collaborate with BOARS to assess the situation in California high schools and determine how UC can use its expertise to diminish the academic achievement gap and disparities due to opportunity for African Americans and other under-represented groups.