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Assembly of the Academic Senate, Academic Council
University of California
1111 Franklin Street, 12th Floor
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December 19, 2003

ROBERT C. DYNES, PRESIDENT

Re: Report of the Graduate and Professional School Admissions Task Force

Dear Bob:

Last year, the Academic Council empanelled a task force to review the admissions procedures of the graduate and professional school programs at UC. The work of the task force is now completed and I am pleased to send its report to you, together with a request that you forward it to the appropriate Regents, administrators and legislators.

Task Force members were selected to represent a broad array of UC's graduate and professional school programs. The findings in the report are based on their review of the admissions criteria, applications, and selection procedures of UC's graduate and professional school programs, and on consultations with the Divisional Senates and graduate deans. The task force concluded that in selecting graduate and professional students, UC carefully considers all of the qualities and experience that a student might bring to a program, and seeks to admit those students with a combination of past academic performance, work and research experience, and demonstrated interest and skills in the particular program.

The task force noted that one area where UC could do better is in reaching out to traditionally under-represented student populations. While some significant efforts have been made to identify and encourage students from these groups to apply, even greater effort along these lines is warranted. Since the task force report does not address the issue of diversity in UC's graduate and professional school student population, I have specifically asked the Senate's Committee on Affirmative Action and Diversity (UCAAD) to explore this area further and to report its findings to the Academic Council this coming spring. When the Council receives the committee's report, I will be happy to share it with you, along with the Academic Council's discussion comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Larry", written in black ink.

Lawrence Pitts, Chair
Academic Council

cc Ross Frank, UCAAD Chair

**REPORT OF THE GRADUATE AND PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL ADMISSIONS
TASK FORCE
12/15/03**

GRADUATE EDUCATION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

During 2001-02, the Academic Senate examined UC undergraduate admissions and the use of standardized tests in those processes. In 2002-03 the Academic Council empanelled a task force to conduct a similar review of admissions procedures and the reliance on standardized tests in graduate and professional programs, the results of which are presented in this report

UC has established some of the finest graduate and professional training programs in the country and the world ¹ -- programs that contribute to the University's renown as a collection of superb research university campuses. Six of the UC campuses belong to the select Association of American Universities, whose membership conveys international recognition and is based on excellence in graduate and undergraduate education and research.² There are nearly 500 UC graduate programs comprising the full gamut of disciplines from aerospace sciences to world art and architecture, as well as professional training in business, dentistry, law, medicine, nursing, optometry, pharmacy, and veterinary medicine among others. UC has earned a reputation as one of the finest public research universities in the world even though its ratio of graduate students to undergraduates is below that of the public and private research universities with which it is compared. Graduate students represent only 17% of the UC's total student population, a smaller share than that of UC's "comparison" public universities (27%) and much less than at comparison private institutions (51 %).³ The Board of Regents has discussed these issues, and plans have been instituted in an attempt to increase graduate student support and graduate student enrollments in order to bring the proportion of California's population enrolled in graduate school closer to the national average.⁴

Graduate students are enormously valuable to the University, the state, and the nation. Faculty research is richer and more productive in the presence of smart and energetic graduate students who often are major contributors to scholarly results. Graduate students are both apprentices developing specialized talents, and teachers of undergraduate students in their particular disciplines. They also represent an important future resource to California as future faculty for California colleges and universities as well as industrialists, lawyers, jurists, teachers, engineers, and healers. Therefore, it is imperative that UC attract the finest graduate student applicants in the world and enroll those with the greatest promise and ability.

Graduate programs by their very nature involve advanced study, and the admissions process aims to select students who will excel in graduate study and bring distinction to their field. Graduate admissions are determined by each graduate program or professional school - the entities most familiar with the discipline - to allow selection of those students who will enrich the graduate program, complete graduate requirements in a timely fashion and successfully apply their graduate-level skills to the workplace.

GRADUATE ADMISSIONS GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Based on the results of its inquiries, the Task Force affirms these principles to be valid and consistent with UC's graduate and professional school admissions practices.

1. The admissions process honors academic excellence and accords priority to students of high academic accomplishment.
2. Graduate admissions procedures involve a comprehensive review of an applicant's academic accomplishment, diverse talents, personal experience, promise, and likely contribution to the school community.
3. Faculty in each graduate program are flexible in creating admission policies and practices that are sensitive to specific program values and academic priorities, and are consistent with Universitywide criteria and policies.
4. No applicant who meets the program's entrance requirements is automatically admitted or rejected on the basis of a single criterion.

Methodology

Task Force members were selected to represent a broad segment of UC's graduate and professional programs. Assembling information from all of UC's graduate and professional program web sites, members reviewed the respective admissions criteria, applications, and procedures of each program. To supplement this information, a senior admissions officer or faculty member from each professional school was interviewed by telephone. The conclusions expressed in this report reflect the Task Force's evaluation and synthesis of these data and a final consultation with Divisional Senates and the Graduate Deans of all campuses. UC's graduate and professional programs are so varied that no single metric of the success of the selection process could be applied; however, consistent high ranking and continued large applicant pools attest to the attractiveness and success of UC's graduate and professional programs.

HOW DOES UC SELECT ITS GRADUATE STUDENTS?

Given the importance of choosing the best possible graduate and professional school students, the University invests great effort in selecting students from a very large pool of highly qualified candidates. The applicant pool is incredibly rich because of the excellence and allure of UC's graduate programs.

By agreement with the Governor and State as defined in the 1960 Master Plan for Higher Education, UC offers *undergraduate* admission to the top 12.5% of California's graduating high school class. These students must have taken a prescribed list of courses and they are identified by their high school class ranking (top 4%) or by a combination of grade point averages (GPAs) and

standardized admissions test scores. From this pool of eligible applicants, UC campuses select students for offers of admission by a process known as "comprehensive review." This methodology varies among the campuses in order to achieve the best possible match between the student and the campus, but the process rests on an extensive review of each application using multiple measures of achievement and promise while considering the context in which each student has demonstrated academic accomplishment.

UC *academic graduate programs*, i.e. masters and doctoral degree programs, also engage in a comprehensive review of each candidate's application. But unlike UC's undergraduate admissions process, graduate admissions does not use a base eligibility index (i.e., test scores and GPA) that determines an initial consideration of applications. For graduate admissions there is no single criterion, or even standard set of criteria, adequate to meet the diverse requirements of the many heterogeneous programs and disciplines. Graduate programs each select their own students, identifying those who are most likely to succeed in the program and contribute to the department and to society. A mutually beneficial relationship exists between programs and students, as the success of one enhances the success of the other. Programs vary widely in the requirements needed to enter a degree program – for example contrast veterinary medicine vs. music. In addition, graduate applicants to specific programs differ significantly in the context of their undergraduate training, the breadth of their preparation, and the diversity of their backgrounds.

In its review of both graduate and professional school admission processes, the Task Force found that all graduate students are admitted based on a thorough evaluation of a range of academic and professional criteria, which include standardized test scores, GPAs, work and research experience, the quality of the undergraduate education, letters of recommendation, and content of and performance in courses, particularly those pertinent to the chosen graduate program. Outstanding special projects, special talents, achievements, awards, and research talents - particularly as they pertain to the specific program to which the student applies - also strengthen an application. Academic accomplishments in light of the applicant's life experiences and special circumstances, and other factors that the student brings to the admissions committee's attention also are considered. Most applications are reviewed by more than one experienced faculty reviewer to ensure a balanced and fair assessment and to improve the chances that the program will enroll the very best students from a range of backgrounds. Many departments use a committee of faculty to read all graduate applications, and sometimes different faculty members weigh the various factors within an application differently. This process yields a student contingent with great potential for success, which will in turn enhance the prestige of the program

UC *professional schools*, e.g., law, medical, and business schools, also comprehensively review all applications, but professional school admissions procedures differ from those for academic graduate programs. The number of well-qualified applicants to most professional schools is much larger than is the pool of applicants to most graduate programs within the UC system. Professional school admissions are unusually competitive, and a strong preference must be granted to candidates with a high likelihood of completion and of passing state licensing tests. A high level of prior accomplishment is generally necessary for success, and admissions decisions assign considerable weight to GPA and standardized test scores. In some instances, a portion of a professional school's applicant pool is offered an interview or admission on the basis of a combination of high GPAs and high scores on standardized tests. If the undergraduate GPA and test scores are very low, the rest of the application has to be exceptional when reviewed by admissions officers if the applicant is to be

offered admission. Students may be admitted despite lower grades and test scores if they have demonstrated excellence in non-academic areas (i.e. published research, service, motivation, etc.). (One UC medical school recently admitted almost 20% of its class from this lower-academic indicator group.) Ultimately the applications of all qualified candidates considered for admission are reviewed comprehensively so that the most appropriate applicants can be selected for the limited number of positions available in that program. In no cases are unqualified students admitted.

UC's USE OF STANDARDIZED TESTING IN GRADUATE AND PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL ADMISSIONS

Standardized tests, such as the Law School Admissions Test (LSAT), Medical College Admissions Test (MCAT), Graduate Management Admissions Test (GMAT), or Graduate Record Examination (GRE), can be important tools for assessment of academic knowledge and skills relevant to graduate study. A standardized test score is one measure that can be compared directly across applicants from a large number of undergraduate majors, schools and countries. Good verbal, quantitative and writing skills are imperative in graduate education, and tests such as the GRE can provide a measure of these skills. An applicant's performance on tests in specific subject areas such as biology, literature, mathematics, physics and chemistry can provide further information about a student's knowledge in areas that may be unusually important in a particular program. Each program wants to admit the best possible students, and standardized tests provide information for assessing the likelihood that the student will be successful in attaining a graduate education. It can be argued that an important part of many types of professional study is the completion of a licensing exam; hence skill at standardized test taking can be regarded as a desirable quality for applicants to such programs. Nonetheless, UC recognizes that standardized test results are only one useful tool for determining admissions to graduate school.

UC's use of these standardized test scores is consistent with guidance from the agencies that administer standardized tests, which explicitly note that scores should be used as part of a comprehensive review process. Standardized test scores are only one element in the overall review of a student and should be considered along with other data. For instance, the Graduate Record Examinations Board notes that the GRE *"does not and cannot measure all the qualities that are important in predicting success in graduate study or in confirming undergraduate achievement"* and that *"multiple sources of information should be used to ensure fairness and balance the limitations of any single measure of knowledge, skills, or abilities."* Similarly, the Law School Admissions Council states that the LSAT *"is designed to measure some, but certainly not all, of the mental and academic skills that are needed for successful law study."*

Most academic graduate programs require the GRE general exam. A review by the Academic Senate of the admissions information from the nearly 500 UC graduate programs found that no program has a minimum score that by itself precludes admission. A review of this same question by the UC Graduate Deans also found no example of a minimum "cut" score.⁵ Where a low GRE score is accompanied by other marks of less than high achievement, such as a low GPA, these factors suggest that the student is unlikely to complete a graduate education as rigorous as those within the UC system.

Most of UC's professional schools consider standardized tests and undergraduate GPAs in the admissions process, but no school has a minimum test score below which the student is automatically excluded. A combination of high GPA and high test score may lead to early review of an application, but indicators of other exceptional qualities, such as unusually strong work or research history, are considered in reviews of all applications regardless of scores.

A number of graduate programs provide summaries of test scores from their recently accepted students. These scores were not used exclusively to select the successful applicants, but they provide some measure of competition that a prospective student can assess. Examples include listing the average test scores of current students (e.g. the Department of Political Science at UC Berkeley: <http://www.polisci.berkeley.edu/GradApplication.html>), or a range of competitive percentile scores (e.g. the Department of Physics at UC Santa Barbara: <http://www.phvsics.ucsb.edu/Education/Graduate/AppstatusContent.php3#GRE>). If a prospective applicant has test scores or a GPA well below those of current students, his or her application is less likely to be successful. An unfavorable comparison does not preclude admission, but the student must understand that other features of the application need to be unusually strong for admission to be possible.

The Diversity of UC's Graduate Students

Comprehensive review of each potential student's application allows a program's admissions committee to consider the circumstances of each applicant's background, accomplishments, and circumstances during their undergraduate education. Outstanding and diverse applicants can be and are identified and often admitted, but many enroll at other prestigious institutions that can recruit using more generous and attractive graduate fellowships and other financial support. California's Proposition 209 precludes UC from using similar tools enhance the diversity of its graduate student population. Given this handicap, UC graduate and professional programs must expend the greatest possible effort to identify and encourage applicants from traditionally under-represented groups. Some significant efforts have been made to reach graduate school candidates in under-represented populations, and this Task Force feels even greater effort along these lines is warranted.

CONCLUSION

The University of California's graduate programs are among the most successful in the world, and all members of the University community are determined to ensure that the programs retain that distinction. We are dedicated not only to the academic quality of our students, but also to providing a rich and diverse environment in which they will learn. In selecting graduate students to join us, we look carefully at all of the qualities and experience that a student might bring to a graduate program, and seek to admit those students with a combination of past academic performance, work and research experience, and demonstrated interest and skills in the particular program. We feel that such a matching of a student's background and accomplishments with the strengths of the graduate program will provide California and the world with the best possible leaders in an increasingly complex environment.

Task Force Membership

Lawrence Pitts, Chair	UCSF	Neurosurgery
David Atwood	UCB	EECS
Michael Bernstein	UCSD	History
Richard Church	UCSB	Geography
Robert Goldstein	UCLA	Law
Bruce Madewell	UCD	Veterinary Medicine
Vickie Mays	UCLA	Psychology
David Mowery	UCB	Business
Henry Ralston	UCSF	Medicine
Samuel Otter	UCB	English
Marjorie Shapiro	UCB	Physics

Notes:

¹ US News and World Report; http://www.usnews.com/usnews/edu/grad/rankings/rankindex_brief.php

² <http://www.aau.edu/>

³ Innovation and Prosperity at Risk: Investing in Graduate Education to Sustain California's Future, Commission on the Growth and Support of Graduate Education, 2001.

<http://www.ucop.edu/services/innovation.pdf>

⁴ The Report of the Commission on Growth and Support of Graduate Education was presented to the Board of Regents in January 2002. In January 2003, a progress report was made to the Regents on implementation of the Commission's core initiatives and recommendations. See minutes of 01/16/03 meeting:

<http://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/regents/minutes/2003/edpol103.pdf>

⁵<http://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/senate/committees/ccga/cogd05-19-03.pdf>