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Chair of the Assembly of the Academic Senate
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University of California
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June 20, 2017

JANET NAPOLITANO, PRESIDENT
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Re: Assembly Approval of Proposed Policy on Augmented Review in Undergraduate Admissions

Dear Janet:

At its June 14, 2017 meeting, the Assembly of the Academic Senate approved a systemwide Policy on Augmented Review in Undergraduate Admissions. The policy originated with the Board of Admissions and Relations with Schools (BOARS) and was approved by the Academic Council on May 24. It is attached to this letter.

The Academic Senate recommends the policy to the Board of Regents in accordance with Regents Standing Order 105.2(a), delegating authority to the Academic Senate over admissions. In my capacity as the Chair of the Assembly, 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 2017 meeting.

The policy outlines guidelines and criteria for the use of Augmented Review (AR) on campuses and three types of supplemental information a campus may request from up to 15% of applicants: 1) a questionnaire inviting the candidate to elaborate on special talents, accomplishments, extraordinary circumstances, and their school/home environment; 2) 7th semester grades; and 3) up to two letters of recommendation (LORs). It states that campuses may solicit LORs only from applicants selected for AR, applicants considered for admission by exception, or applicants given a special review in other specific situations such as athletic admissions.

The policy responds to your September 2016 request for a systemwide policy on letters of recommendation that is uniform across campuses, as well as concerns about the role of LORs in the admissions process and UC Berkeley's desire to require LORs from all of its applicants. The University does not yet have a policy on augmented review or LORs, and the proposed policy will provide guidance to campuses about the use of supplemental information, including LORs.

The policy adopts the perspective that an LOR is meant to convey additional information about an applicant. Given that, the policy outlines criteria for an additional admissions review of a select pool of applicants who fall in the margins for admission, but whose initial application yields an incomplete picture of their qualifications or presents extraordinary circumstances that call for further comment. BOARS based the policy on existing processes at several campuses that use AR for about 3-5% of applicants. Concerns have been raised that seeking LORs broadly tilts the admissions playing field in favor of those who can obtain the best letters; most likely, this is correlated with attending a well-resourced high school. It seems reasonable

that even a determined critic of LORs would accept that if a professionally trained reader has identified an area in which more information is desirable, campuses should attempt to obtain that information. This is the basis for embedding a policy about LORs within a policy on AR.

Moreover, the absence of any systemwide policy on AR was a deficiency BOARS needed to address. This is another advantage of the AR policy, in that it requires a first read of an application by a human reader and a finding that specific information is lacking in the application before a letter is requested. The policy is also consistent with the current research literature, which supports the benefits of multiple LORs in a standardized format and the usefulness of information in the later high school years, such as 7th semester grades, in forecasting college success. Campuses that elect to invite letters of recommendation could, for instance, provide specific prompts that directly target the information requested, which seems preferable to an open-ended request for an LOR.

Faculty, administrators, and Regents have raised concerns about the effect of LORs on disadvantaged populations. These concerns center on the view that LORs conflict with UC principles of access and fairness, because students attending under-resourced schools or from disadvantaged backgrounds will find it more difficult to obtain high-quality letters, and could be disadvantaged by a LOR requirement. Some applicants might simply decide not to apply to a campus expecting LORs, which might have an additional adverse effect on certain groups of students. Concerns have also been expressed that the benefits from LORs are offset by the significant burden imposed on high-school counselors, teachers, and others. There are also concerns that allowing a single UC campus to require LORs as a separate and different condition of admission is inconsistent with the principle that UC is a system. The Academic Council has attempted to address the latter concern during the past two years. When the controversy first arose in July 2015, the Council endorsed a compromise that allowed the Berkeley campus to invite LORs from all applicants ranked as “possible” admits under its new admissions process. In July 2016, however, the Council viewed data on candidates who applied to both Berkeley and UCLA that showed substantially better diversity outcomes at UCLA; Academic Council voted to oppose the continuation of the pilot and its expansion to all applicants.

Your request for a systemwide policy on LORs furthered the urgency to resolve the matter in this current year. The attached policy provides specific guidance to campuses about AR and LORs as well as flexible parameters for implementing local processes for addressing a specific information gap in the application. The policy ensures access, opportunity, and fairness on a systemwide level, and responds to the need to maintain common UC application and admissions requirements across the nine undergraduate campuses. While recommending this policy, BOARS is also contemplating answers to each question in your letter, and views that as an ongoing effort. BOARS has indicated that it views the policy as a starting point it can revisit, if relevant new information comes to light. The committee and the Academic Senate more broadly remain committed to studying admissions results across all campuses to obtain a deeper understanding of the experience that accumulates under the AR policy, and the role that letters or other supplemental information can play in the admissions process.

Sincerely,



Jim Chalfant, Chair
Academic Council

Encl:

Cc: Assembly of the Academic Senate
Senate Director Baxter
Senate Executive Directors

Proposed Policy on Augmented Review in Undergraduate Admissions
Assembly of the Academic Senate
June 2017

Overview of the Augmented Review Process

The augmented review (AR) process is designed for participating campuses to provide additional review for a select pool of applicants who fall in the margins for admission, but whose initial application yields an incomplete picture of their qualifications, or presents extraordinary circumstances that invite further comment. Applicants, for example, might demonstrate special talents, potential, or accomplishments in specific areas that promise to contribute to the educational environment of the campus, but may require further explication. Or, the information provided on an application may fail to adequately explain the impact of what appear to be major disadvantages that the applicant has encountered. A range of potential AR selection criteria are described in the “Criteria for Referral” section below. Consistent with the Guiding Principles the faculty have articulated for undergraduate admissions, applicants referred for the AR process must demonstrate levels of academic preparation and personal qualities that indicate a reasonable chance for academic success given the available support services on the admitting campus.

Admissions readers and officers should use their professional judgement to identify potential AR candidates during the initial review process. They should also select from among the candidates a pool of applicants from whom supplemental information items can be solicited to better inform an admissions decision. The AR pool should be limited in size to around no more than 15% of all applicants. Candidates are invited to submit one or more of the following supplemental information items:

1. A questionnaire that requires paragraph length narrative responses and that allows AR candidates to provide additional details concerning their special talents and accomplishments, extraordinary circumstances, and school and home environment.
2. Seventh-semester high school grades, or equivalent most recent grades.
3. Up to two letters of recommendation, or other input from third parties, including a teacher, counselor, coach, program coordinator, or anyone familiar with the candidate’s academic background and extracurricular skills/talents. Letters of recommendation should focus on both cognitive and psycho-social abilities of candidates.

Note: Letters of recommendation can be requested only for applicants selected for augmented review, and applicants considered for admission by exception (AxE), or applicants given a special review.¹

¹ Because the student may be applying to a major, school, or college that already has a long-standing supplemental application requirement, which specifically includes a letter of recommendation, in addition to the general application for undergraduate admission. Such supplemental applications have included questionnaires, transcripts, personal statements, interviews, auditions, and/or portfolios, but only very rarely require letters of recommendation. Such programs typically focus on the creative arts, performance arts, and nursing.

Criteria for Referral to Augmented Review

For campuses participating in AR, admissions readers and officers should depend on their professional judgement to evaluate each applicant on a full range of selection criteria, using all of the application information available in the context of opportunity and demonstrated capacity to contribute to the campus. While the AR referral criteria outlined below aim to cover likely circumstances that admissions readers and officers might encounter, they may not capture every possible applicant experience that might warrant an additional review. It is therefore imperative that admissions readers and officers use their professional judgement in these circumstances. The criteria for referring an applicant for AR include the following:

1. Evidence of focus on an area of special talent which may have limited a student's time to participate in a broader range of activities.
2. Evidence of character traits that imply a strong likelihood of making a significant contribution to campus life.
3. Evidence of significant academic achievement or the potential for academic achievement at the University in spite of extraordinary or compound disadvantage or other disability or other unusual circumstances.
4. Evidence of significant improvement in the academic record accompanied by one or both of the following: (1) reasons for the initial poor performance; and (2) sustained and in-depth participation in educational outreach programs, which demonstrate the applicant's commitment to succeed academically within a challenging environment.
5. Evidence of relative lack of access to, counseling about, or support to take college preparatory, honors, or Advanced Placement (AP) classes or required college entrance examinations.