The Regents of the University of California

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATIONAL POLICY
October 20, 2008

The Committee on Educational Policy met by teleconference on the above date at the following locations: 1111 Franklin Street, Room 12322, Oakland; 3110 Main Street, Suite 220, Santa Monica.

Members present: Regents Island, Reiss, and Yudof; Staff Advisor Johansen

In attendance: Regent Wachter, Faculty Representative Croughan, Secretary and Chief of Staff Griffiths, Associate Secretary Shaw, General Counsel Robinson, Vice President Sakaki, and Recording Secretary Johns

Due to the lack of a quorum, the meeting was held as a briefing session for the members.

The meeting convened at 3:00 p.m. with Committee Chair Island presiding.

1. **READING OF NOTICE OF MEETING**

For the record, notice was given in compliance with the Bylaws and Standing Orders for a special meeting of the Committee on Educational Policy, for the purpose of addressing an item on the Committee's agenda.

2. **PUBLIC COMMENT**

There were no speakers wishing to address the Committee.

3. **BRIEFING ON ACADEMIC COUNCIL'S PROPOSED REFORMS TO UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA FRESHMAN ELIGIBILITY POLICY**

[Background material was mailed to Regents in advance of the meeting, and copies are on file in the Office of the Secretary and Chief of Staff.]

Committee Chair Island began by noting that this was the fourth briefing sponsored by the Regents on the proposed reforms to the University's freshman eligibility policy. He recognized UCSB Professor Michael Brown, past chair of the Academic Senate's Board of Admissions and Relations with Schools (BOARS) and most recent past chair of the Academic Senate, and UCD Professor Mark Rashid, recent past chair of BOARS.

President Yudof stated that he was sympathetic to the proposal, which he described as complex. He then outlined his own understanding of the underlying issues. The University is facing a significant increase in the number of applicants. The proposal will raise standards and make them more rigorous for the category of applicants guaranteed admission. There is some confusion about the percentages involved, but in effect,

80 percent of those applicants who would be admitted would be chosen on the basis of their statewide and local grade point average and their standardized test scores. The proposal would eliminate the SAT II subject matter tests, which have proven to be more a barrier than a helpful predictor. Eighty percent of entering freshmen would be drawn from those applicants guaranteed admission. Each campus would select its entering class, and approximately 1,000 students denied admission to the campus or campuses of their choice would be admitted to the Merced or the Riverside campus.

The proposal includes a second category of applicants "under review"; approximately 20 percent of the freshman class would be selected from this category. In this category, the University hopes to capture students who did not complete the required "a-g" courses in a timely fashion, but did complete them by their senior year of high school, and students whose success may be predicted by virtue of their volunteerism or leadership activities. The consideration of this category of applicants would incorporate a "fairness factor," examining family income, the applicant's ability to overcome adversity, and other personal strengths or talents which might outweigh other factors in the applicant's record.

President Yudof stressed that this proposal does not represent a reduction in quality of applicants. Most applicants would find themselves in an even more competitive category. The second category would allow the campuses to examine additional qualifications. Applicants in the "under review" category would not be guaranteed admission, and if denied, they would not be automatically admitted to the Merced or the Riverside campus. President Yudof opined that the proposal makes a great deal of sense. Some questions remain to be discussed, such as the minimum GPA for the "under review" category, or the number of additional applications campuses would be required to review.

Professor Brown stated that there are few policy issues brought before the Regents more important than this one. The public sees the University as an engine of hope and opportunity and expects that the University's decisions on admissions policy will be made with this in mind, as well as academic considerations. The proposal accomplishes this and addresses most directly how the top 12.5 percent of California graduating high school seniors is determined. It does not alter the 12.5 percent or lower standards; in fact the proposal raises the bar for guaranteed admission. It corrects a flaw in the current approach, where some applicants guaranteed admission are not necessarily the most highly qualified. Mr. Brown emphasized that the proposal eliminates the unnecessary barriers of the SAT II subject matter tests. No public university comparable to UC requires these tests. The rationale for elimination of the subject matter tests is that minor or technical deficiencies should not remove applicants from close consideration for admission. The proposal was based on analyses of 2003 California Postsecondary Education Commission (CPEC) data. CPEC has made 2007 data available to the University for simulation studies.

Professor Rashid observed that, in the current process, the UC concept of eligibility divides all California high school students into those who will probably not attend UC and those guaranteed admission to a UC campus. The current guarantee provides that, if

applicants meet the eligibility criteria but are not admitted to any campus to which they apply, they will receive an offer from a campus with remaining space, late in the process. In recent years, these offers have come from UCR and UCM.

In response to a question asked by Regent Wachter, Mr. Rashid explained that applicants who are UC-eligible are guaranteed admission. He noted that the current eligibility construct in fact results in an eligibility rate of approximately 14 percent of high school graduates. This is due to the fact that the GPA/test-score index is not adjusted annually, but pursuant to periodic CPEC studies, which are necessarily backward-looking. The most recent CPEC study examined 2007 high school graduates. The number of students declared eligible under the GPA/test-score index increases over time.

In response to a question asked by Regent Reiss, Mr. Rashid confirmed that the 12.5 percent figure is notional, a target figure which the University attempts to reach by setting minimum GPA and test scores.

Regent Wachter recalled that, when the University raised the minimum GPA, the eligibility rate was 14 percent.

Mr. Rashid observed that the 2003 CPEC study involved a small sample, and that, based on the new 2003 GPA/test-score index, UC eligibility was higher than 12.5 percent.

In response to a question asked by Regent Reiss, Mr. Brown explained that the University does not and in fact cannot determine applicants' percentile status in "real time" when they apply.

In response to a question asked by Regent Reiss, Mr. Rashid explained that the statewide GPA standard considers all California high schools, both private and public. Mr. Brown added that the California Master Plan for Higher Education applies the same standards to public and private schools.

Mr. Rashid then turned to eligibility factors which are more determinative than the GPA/test-score index. In order for applicants to be visible to the index, they must have completed 15 a-g college preparatory courses, which are certified for UC admission in every high school. This requirement only applies to in-state students.

In response to a question asked by Regent Wachter, Mr. Rashid explained that an applicant's higher GPA can make up for lower test scores.

Mr. Rashid continued with the observation that, among students who have completed the a-g courses, the factor most often precluding eligibility is the SAT II subject test requirement. These are two subject tests, in two subject areas, in addition to the core SAT I/ACT. This requirement is unique to UC among public universities; a handful of private elite universities require subject tests.

In response to a question asked by Regent Wachter, Faculty Representative Croughan confirmed that the Regents Examination is still required in New York State.

Mr. Rashid then recalled that the three elements required for UC eligibility are completion of a-g courses, completion of the SAT test pattern, and meeting the GPA/test-score index. He emphasized that the index in fact sets a very modest standard. Almost every student who completes the a-g courses and the SAT tests meets the index requirement. The index excludes almost no one. The minimum GPA for the a-g courses is 3.0, which is considerably below the average for students who complete a-g courses. With that minimum GPA, an applicant needs an average score of 470 in all SAT tests. This is due to the small pool of applicants, constrained by the requirement of subject tests.

In response to a question asked by Regent Wachter, Mr. Rashid noted that there are many reasons for the difficulty of taking SAT subject tests. The University accepts 19 out of 20 subject tests administered by the College Board, and requires that two be taken, in two different subject areas.

Regent Wachter expressed surprise at the fact that college-bound high school students who have completed a-g courses and taken the SAT core examination would fail to take the subject tests. Completion of the a-g courses would appear to be more burdensome.

Mr. Rashid responded that approximately one-third of high school students complete a-g courses and attend UC or the California State University (CSU). The number of students who take the SAT subject tests is almost the same as the number who apply to UC. Students do not take these tests unless they wish to apply to UC.

In response to a question asked by Regent Wachter, Mr. Rashid informed those present that annually, approximately 15 percent of California resident applicants are not eligible for admission, or about 10,000 to 11,000 applicants. The majority of applicants found to be ineligible, more than 50 percent, are ineligible due to failure to take the SAT subject tests. For other applicants, it is often a missing course from the a-g sequence, such as an English course.

Mr. Rashid noted that a certain number of applicants fail to take the SAT subject tests because they are unaware of UC's requirements. The current policy strictly and rigidly applies UC requirements to students to be visible to the GPA/test-score index. Even a high-achieving student who fails to fulfill these requirements is by definition ineligible and almost certainly will not attend UC. There is a mechanism for admission by exception, but it is not frequently used and not well known.

Regent Wachter asked about the difference between eligibility at UC and CSU. Mr. Rashid responded that CSU does not require standardized tests, provided that an applicant's a-g GPA is above 3.0. If this GPA is between 2.0 and 3.0, the applicant is required to take the SAT, but no subject test. The minimum GPA for CSU eligibility is 2.0. CSU uses the same a-g courses, which are certified by UC.

Mr. Brown observed that, according to the Master Plan, CSU is supposed to admit the top one-third of high school graduates. According to the 2003 CPEC data, CSU admitted the top 28 percent of high school graduates.

Regent Reiss asked if CSU automatically eliminates applicants if they have not completed an a-g course. Director of Policy and External Affairs Nina Robinson responded that CSU has a procedure which allows applicants to appeal a decision based purely on eligibility. CSU admits some students with minor deficiencies.

Regent Wachter suggested that high schools are failing to explain UC requirements to their students and that the core problem is that even the most ambitious high school students are not being guided well.

Regent Reiss emphasized the unfavorable ratio of high school counselors to students, 1 to 500 in some large school districts. She recalled an earlier budget goal of Governor Schwarzenegger, now unrealized, to reduce this ratio to 1 to 300. She also observed that many high schools lack credentialed teachers for a-g courses.

Regents Wachter and Reiss, Mr. Brown and Mr. Rashid concurred that the infrastructure of support for high school students is inadequate, that schools in lower-income communities are more adversely affected, and that the situation is not likely to improve soon. Mr. Brown noted that the overall ratio of students to counselors in California high schools is almost 1,000 to 1, the worst in the nation.

Mr. Rashid continued by discussing the reasons for the BOARS proposal. The current policy is supposed to identify the top 12.5 percent of high school graduates, but in fact is a "hoop-jumping exercise" which favors students from privileged backgrounds and schools with good resources. This policy cannot identify the top 12.5 percent academically. The GPA/test-score index is the only performance metric in the policy, and the required minimum GPA and test scores are modest.

In response to a question asked by Regent Wachter, Mr. Rashid confirmed that, if the system were not skewed and certain students were not disadvantaged, this set of modest standards would result in 30 percent eligibility rather than 15 percent. He observed that, if more high school students became visible to the index, the University would have to raise the index requirement. He opined that the index is not a rational way to identify academic excellence.

Regent Wachter emphasized that significantly greater numbers of students would be admitted to UC if it were not for the SAT subject test requirements. Mr. Brown estimated these students to be in the thousands; among UC applicants, between 1,500 and 2,000 annually.

Mr. Rashid continued by observing that the current policy excludes many bright, high-achieving high school students who are invisible to the index because they have not

fulfilled all the UC requirements. The policy is not identifying excellence as it should and not excluding students who might do better to pursue other postsecondary options.

Regent Reiss noted that some of the approximately 5,000 ineligible applicants who missed a-g courses might be academically superior, but attending a high school without adequate resources.

Regents Reiss and Wachter and Mr. Brown concurred that responsibility cannot be attributed entirely to high school students to make themselves UC-eligible, given overcrowding in schools, unfavorable student-counselor ratios, and the fact that most students require help in fulfilling UC requirements.

Regent Wachter suggested that the State could require every high school student to receive information about UC admissions. This could be a way to address high school students' lack of knowledge about the test requirements. Mr. Rashid observed that there is a complicated range of reasons for which students do not take the required tests.

Faculty Representative Croughan recalled that all the students in question have taken the SAT I. The necessary information was received from a counselor or other source regarding this core reasoning test. She observed that lack of awareness about the subject test requirement might be due to the fact that UC is the only public university which has this requirement, along with only three private universities: Cornell University, Yale University, and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Regent Reiss stressed that most high school students apply to both public and private universities.

Mr. Rashid underscored the reality that thousands of students annually make themselves ineligible by not taking the subject tests.

Mr. Brown remarked that the University must consider the educational justification for the method by which it determines the 12.5 percent.

Mr. Rashid described the subject test requirement as problematic and questioned whether it provides any benefit to the University in improving the quality of the selection process. This quality can be subjected to statistical and empirical analysis. This has been done, and results show unequivocally that scores on the subject tests do not help the University make good admission decisions. Statistical analyses have examined the increments of predictive validity, concerning the University's ability to predict freshman grades based on information available about an applicant at the time of application. SAT subject test scores increase the predictive validity for freshman GPA only negligibly. Knowledge of these scores in aggregate at the time of application does not help the University, while the requirement for the subject tests is hurting the University.

There are two main elements in the proposal. The first is to eliminate the SAT subject test requirement. Individual UC programs, such as engineering programs, may still

recommend that students take a subject test, but it will not be a requirement for eligibility.

The second element is the introduction of a new category, "Entitled To Review" (ETR). Applicants who would fall into this review category are those who make good efforts toward college eligibility. They would be on track to complete the a-g courses, would complete the SAT I or ACT test and would have a reasonable GPA. Mr. Rashid observed that the definition of a "reasonable GPA" remains to be determined. The ETR designation guarantees applicants that the campus will review their application and admit them if they are competitive with other applicants to that campus, using the same comprehensive review process now used at UC.

In response to questions asked by Regents Reiss and Wachter, Mr. Rashid clarified that a smaller percentage of students – 9.7 percent – will be guaranteed admission, while the remaining approximately 3 percent admitted will be admitted from the ETR pool. While the proposal restricts the number of applicants who are guaranteed admission by the current referral mechanism to a smaller core, it also broadens the range of students visible to the institution, since 21.7 percent of high school graduates will fall in the ETR category.

Mr. Brown recalled that the Master Plan requires UC to admit the top 12.5 percent of high school graduates, but does not instruct the University how to determine this 12.5 percent. It was the University that decided in 1968 to use a guarantee structure. The proposal suggests that the method currently employed is not the best possible.

Mr. Rashid observed that the 9.7 percent who would be guaranteed admission are approximately 80 percent of the entire 12.5 percent who will be admitted. He added the caveat that not all the high school graduates in this 9.7 percent will apply to UC. In order to qualify for this 9.7 percent guaranteed category, students must first qualify for ETR designation. ETR designation would require completion of the SAT I, completion of 11 out of 15 a-g courses by the end of eleventh grade, and, in the Academic Senate proposal, an unweighted GPA in those courses of 2.8 or above. "Unweighted" means unweighted by honors bonus points.

Within the ETR pool, there will be a smaller set of students who satisfy criteria for the 9.7 percent guaranteed category. These students are either within the top 9 percent of their graduating class in a-g course GPA, weighted by honors bonus points, or within the top 9 percent statewide, according to a GPA/test-score index similar to the one now used.

In response to a question asked by Regent Reiss, Mr. Rashid explained that the statewide index involves GPA and test scores, while the in-school criteria involve only GPA. The in-school criteria are based on the existing Eligibility in the Local Context program (ELC), which identifies the top 4 percent of high school graduates based on rank ordering by GPA. The ELC program does not take test scores into account.

Mr. Brown pointed out that guaranteed admission to UC is not guaranteed admission to the campus of choice.

Mr. Rashid continued with the observation that these two methods for determining the top 9.7 percent, in-school and statewide, result in two pools of applicants which overlap considerably. Together the two pools represent approximately 10 percent of high school graduates, not 18 percent. Belonging to this "elite category" guarantees applicants that they will be admitted to UCR or UCM later in the process, if they are not admitted elsewhere. Historical data show that most applicants in this situation do not accept such an admission offer.

In response to a question asked by Regent Reiss, Mr. Rashid stated that approximately 26,000 students applied to UCR and UCM in 2007.

In response to remarks by Regent Wachter, Mr. Rashid confirmed that there is competition among the campuses for highly-qualified students. The Berkeley campus admits approximately 3 times the number of students it needs to fill its entering freshman class. The Davis, Santa Barbara, and Irvine campuses admit 4 to 4.5 times the number needed. On average, students are applying to 3.5 campuses.

Regent Wachter suggested that competition among the most prestigious and popular campuses would be mitigated if there were 30,000 applicants guaranteed admission, and each of these campuses admitted 12,000 students.

In response to a question asked by Regent Reiss, Ms. Robinson stated that approximately 36,000 new freshmen were enrolled at UC this year, while approximately 55,000 applicants were admitted.

In response to remarks by Regent Wachter, Mr. Rashid estimated that UCR admits around 20,000 students.

Regent Wachter asked about the GPA requirement for the 9.7 percent guaranteed group. Mr. Rashid responded that, in the statewide scenario, there is a sliding scale. A student in this group with a 3.5 GPA would have test scores around 1,800 out of 2,400. He anticipated that the referral pool generated by this guarantee structure will be smaller than it is currently, because students with high indices often have the option of attending private universities.

Mr. Rashid identified as important the questions of how many students of the 9.7 percent group will apply, and of those, how many will attend UC.

Regent Wachter speculated on the number of students from the top 12.5 percent who attend universities other than UC, and inquired about the status of students actually admitted. Mr. Rashid responded that almost all students now admitted to UC are by definition eligible and among the top 12.5 percent. Actual enrollment represents less than

8 percent of the state's graduates. The University does not have the capacity to enroll 12.5 percent.

Mr. Brown explained that campuses receive enrollment targets. They then base their admission numbers on estimates of yield, which are relatively stable from year to year. The 12.5 percent is a known quantity.

In response to a question asked by Regent Reiss, Mr. Rashid clarified that the new GPA/test-score index will include only the GPA and the SAT I reasoning test. He stated that it will be the task of BOARS to determine the appropriate GPA and test score numbers in order to identify the desired 9.7 percent. If the GPA were below 3.0, the test scores would have to be high, with an average of 730 for each section of the test. If the GPA were 3.5, the average test score would have to be 612. Mr. Rashid anticipated that BOARS will establish an absolute floor for the GPA. He suggested 3.0 as a hypothetical number. There will also be a minimum standard for the ETR category.

In response to remarks by Regent Wachter, Mr. Rashid clarified that, under the proposed policy, there will be no obligation to consider students for the ETR category who have a GPA under a specific threshold, such as 2.8. There may be higher GPA floor for guaranteed admission. This has yet to be determined. The index for guaranteed admission will be determined, published and known. It will be a list of GPAs and test scores.

In response to a remark by Regent Reiss, Mr. Rashid concurred that, while the index involves both GPA and test scores, it may include a minimum GPA for admission, and this GPA may be higher than 2.8.

Faculty Representative Croughan pointed out that, under the current method of comprehensive review, even if an applicant achieves the required GPA and SAT scores, this does not guarantee admission to the campus of choice, only to the University. She presented the hypothetical case of an applicant with a 3.9 GPA, good SAT scores, but a poor essay on the UC application. Such an applicant might receive a referral to UCM or UCR.

Mr. Rashid expressed the hope that the University would effectively communicate to the public that, under the proposal, the guarantee of admission is not significant, since applicants who do not receive a guarantee will still be considered for admission. Likewise, many of the applicants guaranteed admission will not take the University's offer. He described the guaranteed admission as a small extra benefit for applicants with high GPAs and test scores. The guarantee will not be important to the majority of UC applicants.

Mr. Brown noted that it will take time for the public to understand that the guarantee in the new proposal is not an "all or nothing" construct, as it is presently. In response to a remark by Regent Wachter, he confirmed that currently, the top 12.5 percent are guaranteed admission; under the proposal, the top 21.7 percent will be considered for admission.

In response to a question asked by Regent Reiss, Mr. Rashid explained that there is a mechanism to admit students who have not met the strict a-g requirements, admission by exception. Campuses are reluctant to use this mechanism. Regental policy allows for admission of up to 6 percent of an enrolled class through admission by exception. Systemwide it accounts for approximately 2 percent of UC students and is thus a minor pathway to the University. Campuses prefer not to exercise this option; it is difficult to explain to applicants and parents why an ineligible student would be admitted ahead of an eligible one.

Regent Reiss expressed concern about public perceptions of the proposed reforms, such as the required GPA for the ETR category. The University may find itself on the defensive, with a public perception that it is lowering standards, even if it is not.

Mr. Brown stated that the public has given the University responsibility for making these decisions. The public expects UC to make decisions based on educational and not political considerations. He recalled that earlier, when UC raised its minimum GPA requirement, this was not due to the quality of applicants, but to comply with the 12.5 percent requirement.

Mr. Rashid stated that there are good educational reasons for the minimum GPA. He observed that, for largely non-educational reasons, the University might establish a 3.0 weighted GPA as the floor for the ETR category.

In response to a question asked by Regent Reiss, Mr. Rashid observed that a 3.0 unweighted GPA represents a higher absolute standard of performance. A 2.8 unweighted GPA is a standard similar to a 3.0 weighted GPA. A 3.0 unweighted GPA is higher still, and higher than the current minimum for guaranteed admission. Mr. Brown observed that a 3.0 unweighted GPA as the minimum standard for the ETR category would have a significant demographic impact and would not be educationally justified.

Regent Reiss observed that the proposal for a 2.8 unweighted GPA minimum for ETR, which does not include honors courses, does not represent an essential change to the minimum GPA requirement; it may even establish a stricter floor, but in fact it will benefit schools in lower-income districts.

Mr. Rashid discussed the rationale for the BOARS proposal of a 2.8 unweighted GPA minimum for ETR. While the strength of an applicant's course-taking pattern is important, the most appropriate mechanism to account for course-taking behaviors is comprehensive review. Reviewers know the applicant's school and what resources were available to the applicant. BOARS felt that the minimum qualification for ETR should not incorporate honors courses.

In response to a question asked by Regent Reiss, Mr. Rashid explained that, in current policy, the GPA of the top 4 percent of high school graduates identified in the ELC

program is weighted. The GPA for the statewide eligibility pool of 12.5 percent is weighted up to a maximum of eight semesters of honors courses.

Regent Reiss asked about the rationale for the ELC program, suggesting that students in the top 4 percent of a lower-performing school might fall below the statewide eligibility index, and that the ELC guarantee would ensure that they are not prevented from attending UC. Mr. Rashid responded that the ELC program is designed to review applicants in competition with their peers. He noted that currently, the top 4 percent in-school pool identified by ELC overlaps with the statewide 12.5 percent pool almost completely.

Mr. Brown discussed the original impetus for the ELC program in 2001, when there were projections of statewide total eligibility of 11.4 percent. He opined that the greatest benefit of the ELC program is its early outreach to schools, informing high school students of their potential UC eligibility. Mr. Rashid added that there is evidence that the ELC letter, sent to students at lower-performing high schools, stimulates them to complete the a-g course sequence.

Regent Reiss pointed out that the proposed policy will increase the in-school guarantee from the top 4 to the top 9 percent, and opined that this will increase diversity. Regent Wachter stated that the proposed system appears fair.

Mr. Rashid emphasized that the broader ETR category will grant comprehensive review to a greater number of students. This is an elaborate, nuanced process which examines applicants' activities and college readiness, not merely numbers.

In response to a question asked by Regent Reiss, Mr. Rashid anticipated that, under the proposal, there may be students in the top 9 percent of lower-performing schools who are not within the top 9 percent statewide. He noted that it is difficult to compare this proposed in-school 9 percent pool with the current statewide 12.5 percent.

Mr. Rashid observed that, under the proposal, there may be greater competition for admission to popular campuses such as UCLA due to the slightly larger applicant pool.

Regent Reiss noted that UCLA will still select students from among the highest-achieving applicants.

Mr. Brown stressed that, despite the greater number of applicants, competitive applicants will not be excluded. Under the current system, some high-achieving students are artificially excluded from consideration.

In response to a question asked by Regent Reiss, Mr. Rashid stated that almost all students admitted to UCLA come from the guaranteed pool.

The meeting adjourned at 5:00 p.m.

Attest:

Secretary and Chief of Staff