

Office of the President
July 3, 2003

TO MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATIONAL POLICY:

ITEM FOR ACTION

For Meeting of July 17, 2003

**ADOPTION OF ACADEMIC SENATE RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING
FRESHMAN ADMISSIONS TESTING**

The President recommends that the Committee on Educational Policy recommend to The Regents that changes in the requirements for freshman eligibility recommended by the Board of Admissions and Relations with Schools (BOARS) and adopted by the Assembly of the Academic Senate on May 28, 2003 be approved as follows:

Effective for students entering UC as freshmen for Fall 2006, each applicant for admission must submit scores on an approved core test of Mathematics, Language Arts, and Writing. The applicant must also submit scores on approved supplementary subject matter tests to be taken in two different "a-f" subject areas: History/Social Science, English, Mathematics, Laboratory Science, Language other than English, or Visual and Performing Arts. Approval of tests shall be determined by the Board of Admissions and Relations with Schools, with the concurrence of Academic Council and the Assembly of the Academic Senate. The minimum scores acceptable shall be determined by the Board of Admissions and Relations with Schools, and may vary depending upon the overall grade-point record of the applicant.

BACKGROUND

I. Development of New Policy on Admissions Tests through May 2002

Since the 1960s, the University of California's eligibility requirements have mandated that all applicants submit scores from the ACT or SAT I and three SAT II subject exams. Scores from these tests are combined with students' grades in "a-g" courses to determine eligibility and are also used in the admissions selection processes at campuses that cannot admit all UC-eligible applicants. In February 2001, President Atkinson spoke before the American Council on Education calling on colleges and universities to re-examine the role of standardized tests in college admissions. At the same time, he asked the University's faculty to take up this question with regard to UC's eligibility and admissions processes.

In response, in spring 2001, BOARS began intensive study of the role of standardized tests in the admission process. In January 2002, BOARS issued a discussion paper in which it put forth a series of principles to guide the use of admissions tests at the University of California and recommended changes to the University's current use of admissions tests. Specifically, BOARS recommended that the University adopt a "core test" covering the fundamental disciplines of language arts (reading and writing, including a writing sample) and mathematics. The BOARS

principles for the use of admissions tests specified that the core test should be demonstrably related to the college preparatory curriculum students are expected to study in high school and that it should offer diagnostic information to students, parents, and educators enabling them to identify academic strengths and weaknesses. In reviewing the currently available admissions tests, BOARS found that the ACT lacked a writing component and questioned whether the content of the material tested in the SAT I was sufficiently related to the college preparatory curriculum.

The BOARS recommendations on testing were discussed at length by the Committee on Educational Policy at the March 2002 and May 2002 meetings. One issue raised at these meetings was whether the BOARS recommendations essentially mandated the creation of a “California-only” test— given that BOARS found that neither of the two admissions tests currently approved by the University (the ACT and SAT I) were consistent with its principles. This issue was resolved in the early summer of 2002, when both ACT, Inc. and the College Board announced plans to revise their existing national tests in ways that bring them much closer to the BOARS recommendations. Beginning in 2005, ACT, Inc. will offer an optional writing test along with its existing national test of mathematics and language arts; this test will be available to all ACT test-takers across the country. Additionally, the College Board has announced plans to add a mandatory writing exam to its existing core test and to make substantial changes to the SAT I that move toward addressing BOARS’ concerns about the scope of its mathematics content coverage, as well as its basis in the college preparatory curriculum and its ability to provide diagnostic feedback to students and schools. The College Board will begin administering this test in March 2005.

II. New Developments Since the May 2002 Regents’ Meeting

During the fourteen months since The Regents last discussed admissions tests, the Academic Senate has completed very substantial additional work needed to finalize its recommendations. This work includes extensive faculty consultation and review at both the systemwide and campus levels; BOARS’ preparation and dissemination of a second paper on testing, focusing on the subject matter examinations; continued work with the testing agencies; and development and approval, during the winter and spring of 2003, of the specific recommendation before The Regents today.

Throughout the Spring 2002 semester, campus divisions of the Academic Senate held Town Hall meetings on BOARS’ recommendations and solicited input from campus-level committees on admissions and educational policy. Building on the feedback that it received during these meetings, BOARS in September issued another discussion paper addressing the second aspect of UC’s testing policy, the supplemental tests in specific subjects areas. The University’s current testing policy requires that applicants submit scores from SAT II achievement tests in three subject areas: Writing, Mathematics, and a third area of the student’s choice. The January 2002 BOARS paper had suggested that this requirement be reduced from three to two, in recognition of the fact that writing would now be tested as part of the “core” requirement and in order to avoid increasing the total number of tests applicants are required to take.

In September 2002, BOARS confirmed that applicants should be required to take two subject area tests and specified that these tests must be taken from two different areas of the six subjects

covered in the University's "a-g" requirements: History/Social Science, English, Mathematics, Laboratory Science, Language other than English, and Visual and Performing Arts. In making this recommendation, BOARS stressed that (1) subject tests should complement the "core" test by testing more of the breadth of students' knowledge; that (2) writing and Mathematics need no longer be required in the subject test battery because they would now be adequately tested in the new "core" test¹; and that (3) for purposes of selection to specific programs, campuses were free to strongly recommend that applicants take specific examinations (for example, Colleges of Engineering and other math-based programs may recommend that applicants take the SAT II Mathematics Level 2c examination). BOARS also recommended that, pending future research on the predictive validity of the different exams, the three components of the core test and two additional subject scores be weighted equally relative to one another in the Eligibility Index (at present, subject area tests are weighted twice as heavily as the ACT/SAT I mathematics and verbal scores).

The second BOARS paper was approved by the Academic Council and distributed to campuses for their review in October 2002. In February 2003, the Academic Council unanimously adopted language endorsing the "core-plus-two" concept—including BOARS' specific recommendations with respect to the subject matter tests—and reaffirming its support for BOARS' continued work with ACT, Inc. and the College Board in the development of new tests. Academic Council acknowledged that, if this work with the testing agencies continues to be fruitful, the actual changes to the wording of existing Senate policy that would be required to bring current policy into conformance with BOARS recommendations would be slight: eliminating reference to the current names of the acceptable "core" tests (both agencies may make slight changes to the names of their tests), changing the number of subject tests required from three to two, and specifying that the subject tests be taken in two different disciplinary areas.

Academic Council also recognized the pragmatic need to begin informing current high school students of the details of the new testing requirement, even though the new core tests themselves are not yet sufficiently developed for BOARS to certify that they are consistent with its principles. Thus, in April 2003, Academic Council unanimously approved BOARS' recommendation for a transition plan in which, beginning with the entering freshman class of 2006, the University will accept, on an interim basis, scores on the ACT with Writing and the new SAT examinations in satisfaction of the core test requirement. These interim approvals will be in effect for two years. BOARS will complete an in-depth review of the new admissions tests and their alignment with the testing principles no later than 2008. In the intervening years, BOARS will collect data on the new tests that will enable this evaluation. This recommendation is consistent with one of BOARS' recommendations from the January 2002 paper: that admissions tests and the University's testing requirements be evaluated on a regular basis.

The recommendations from BOARS and the Academic Council for the changes to the testing requirement were discussed by the Academic Assembly at its meetings in both March and May 2003. In May, the Assembly voted 43-3 to adopt the revisions to the language of the University's policy on admissions tests that are before The Regents today. They also voted

¹ At present, applicants must take both the mathematics portion of the SAT I and a second SAT II exam (Level 1c or Level 2c) in mathematics. In response to BOARS' comments, the College Board has increased the scope of mathematics knowledge covered in the new SAT to approach that covered in the SAT II Level 1c exam. Research conducted at BOARS' behest in the fall of 2001 concluded that testing students twice in mathematics contributed no additional predictive validity to that provided by a single test. See Attachment for more information.

unanimously to adopt the recommendations from BOARS and the Academic Council regarding the transition plan for implementation and evaluation of the new admissions tests.

This change is scheduled to take effect for the cohort of students who just finished their freshman year of high school and will apply to enter the University as freshmen in the Fall 2006 term. Last year, University staff began alerting high schools to the possibility of a change in the testing requirement. Assuming The Regents adopt this recommendation, this fall's Counselors' Conferences will include detailed information on the new policy and how students should prepare for and approach the new testing requirement. The change will also be addressed on the University's website, in publications, and in direct communications with students, parents, teachers, and counselors.