Office of the President
March 6, 2002

TO MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATIONAL POLICY:

ITEM FOR DISCUSSION

For Meeting of March 12, 2002

UC ADMISSIONS TESTING PROPOSAL

On January 30, 2002, the Board of Admissions and Relations with Schools (BOARS) presented to the Academic Council a discussion paper on admissions testing policy. This paper, a copy of which is attached, was sent to The Regents the same day. The Academic Council is now circulating it widely among the faculty and the broader University community.

On March 12, The Regents will hold the first of two special information sessions to discuss the BOARS paper. The purpose of these sessions is to inform The Regents as fully as possible as to the thinking underlying BOARS' position on admissions testing and to solicit a broad range of views on the issues the discussion paper raises. To achieve this purpose, Academic Council Chair Chand Viswanathan, BOARS Chair Dorothy Perry, and BOARS Testing Subcommittee Chair Calvin Moore will present BOARS' overall findings and describe the current status and future plans for Academic Senate review of BOARS' recommendations. In addition, experts from within and outside the University community have been invited to participate in a panel discussing various aspects of the BOARS paper.

The second informational meeting, to be held Tuesday, May 14, will be devoted to updating The Regents on issues that have been raised by The Regents and in the broad faculty discussion of the proposed policy. In addition, representatives of the major testing agencies will be available to present specific proposals regarding tests they could develop to meet the requirements laid out by BOARS, should the BOARS recommendations be endorsed by the Academic Council and adopted by The Regents.

Background

BOARS began re-examining aspects of the University's admissions testing requirements in the mid-1990s. They began formal study of the role of standardized tests in the admissions process in February 2001, following President Atkinson's February 18 speech to the American Council on Education recommending elimination of the SAT I. Over the past thirteen months, BOARS has devoted substantial time to analyzing the educational policy issues related to admissions tests. In addition, in October 2001, the Office of the President released the findings of a statistical study on the relative value of the SAT I and SAT II in predicting undergraduate student success at the University of California. In November 2001, the Divisional Academic Senate at UCSB hosted a three-day conference at the Santa Barbara campus on the role of the

SAT I and other admissions tests in determining eligibility for admission to the University and in selecting students to be admitted to specific campuses.

BOARS' conclusions, and the reasoning upon which they are founded, are detailed in the January 30 discussion paper, the essential points of which are as follows:

- Based on the statistical evidence provided in the OP study, BOARS concluded that there is no evidence that the SAT I is preferable, on statistical grounds, to more subject-related tests such as the SAT II.

- Given the lack of a clear-cut statistical reason to prefer one type of test over another, BOARS then considered the use of admissions tests in terms of educational policy. In reviewing the history of the University's adoption of standardized admissions tests, BOARS concluded that the original decision to adopt the current test battery (which includes the SAT I or ACT and three SAT II subject tests) was not based on clearly thought-out and articulated principles, but rather on a pragmatic need to quickly sort large numbers of applicants for the purposes of determining both eligibility and selection at specific campuses.

- To address this lack of clearly articulated principles guiding the use of admissions tests, BOARS proposed the following appropriate uses for admissions tests at the University of California:
  - to assess academic preparation and achievement of UC applicants;
  - to predict success at UC beyond that predicted by high school GPA;
  - to aid in establishing UC eligibility;
  - to aid in selecting students for admission at individual UC campuses.

- BOARS also recommends a set of desired properties that admissions tests used by the University of California should incorporate:
  - An admissions test should be a reliable measurement that provides uniform assessment and should be fair across demographic groups.
  - An admissions test should measure levels of mastery of content in UC-approved high school preparatory coursework and should provide information to students, parents, and educators enabling them to identify academic strengths and weaknesses.
  - An admissions test should be demonstrably useful in predicting student success at UC and provide information beyond that which is contained in other parts of the application.
  - An admissions test should be useful in a way that justifies its social and monetary costs.

- BOARS then considered the current admissions test battery in light of these principles and desired properties and concluded that none of the tests currently in use fully meets the needs of the University. Therefore, BOARS recommends that the University adopt a new test battery which would provide greater breadth, depth, and rigor than the current

test pattern. This test battery would include a new core achievement examination covering mastery of the fundamental disciplines needed for University-level work: language arts (reading and writing, including a writing sample) and mathematics. The core test would be augmented with two one-hour long examinations in specific content areas covered by the University's A-G requirements and allowing some degree of student choice regarding the specific subjects.

- As BOARS developed its recommendations, its members met on several occasions with representatives of ACT, Inc. and the College Board. Both organizations have assured BOARS that they are interested in working with the faculty to develop new tests that would meet the University's requirements, would have predictive validity equal to or greater than that of current tests, and whose scores could be made transportable to other institutions and to ranking services. They have also indicated preliminarily that it is feasible to complete this work in time to implement this recommendation for students applying for admission in Fall 2006.

- BOARS also concluded that several issues related to the development of a new test policy require further analysis and discussion. These include the use of foreign language examinations to meet the optional subject test portion of the proposed test battery; the best way to test the range of mathematics mastery that some campus colleges and departments require; and the role the SAT I should play in admission of both California residents and nonresidents following implementation of the new test battery. BOARS will continue to study these issues in the coming months. However, resolution of these issues in not required in order to move ahead with the January recommendations.

(Attachments: discussion paper; College Board presentation)