Campus Admission Verification Processes and Policies

An Interim Report of the President's Academic Verification Task Force

Note: This is an interim report for discussion at the November 15-16, 2017 Meeting of the UC Board of Regents

**Office of the President
University of California
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Campus Admission Verification Processes and Policies: An Interim Report of the President's Academic Verification Task Force

In the fall, students applying to the University of California submit their applications for admission. At the point of application, all of the information that they submit are self-reported (e.g., courses completed, grades, senior year courses they are taking or plan to take). Then, during each spring and summer, as the final step of preparing a class for enrollment in the fall term, UC campuses verify the academic accomplishments of admitted students to ensure that they have met all conditions of their admission to UC. Typically, campuses request official high school and community college transcripts as well as official test scores to verify that the student earned, for example, a high school diploma, completed all necessary "a-g" courses, maintained at least a C average in the senior year of high school, and/or completed pre-major requirements for transfer to the junior level.

UC's academic verification process, similar to processes conducted at colleges and universities across the country, ensures the integrity of its admissions process by verifying the credentials of each student it admits. However, after a high-profile incident at the UC Irvine campus, in which the campus withdrew the admission of 290 students for a failure to submit validating information, observers expressed significant concern that current practices might be too harsh and that the campus was more concerned in managing its fall enrollment than in serving new students.

The Irvine Chancellor ultimately reinstated all impacted students. Even so, President Napolitano established an Academic Verification Task Force to assess systemwide policies and practices and to make recommendations to the Board of Regents that serve the institution and its students well. The President asked that the Task Force report its findings and recommendations at the November meeting of the Board of Regents.

Task Force Charge and Membership Roster

Appendix 1 contains the Task Force charge. Provost and Executive Vice President Michael T. Brown chaired the Task Force, which included membership from all UC campuses, as well as two external members (see Appendix 2 for a membership roster).[1]

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[1] The Task Force is particularly indebted to the service of Philip Ballinger, Associate Vice Provost for Enrollment Management at the University of Washington and Kent Hopkins, Vice President for Enrollment at Arizona State University who served as external members. These representatives provided an important outside perspective regarding the verification processes used by public institutions outside of California and represent an important validation of UC's practices and whether they conform with generally accepted standards nationally.

Within this expedited period, the Task Force met semi-weekly from late September to early November. During the course of its work, the Task Force:

- Evaluated the timeliness of communications to admitted students regarding the verification of official documents;

- Reviewed whether the number and type of solicited documents can be reduced or provided in more effective ways;

- Examined whether UC's need for transcript and test score information is aligned effectively with the ability of K-12 schools, community colleges, and testing organizations to generate this information;

- Assessed the needs of the campuses to maintain the academic integrity of the admission process; and

- Considered the adequacy of the appeals process at each campus.

The Task Force reviewed relevant campus and systemwide material relevant to academic verification. These materials included relevant policies and guidelines, campus admission agreements, typical communications used to inform students about the need to submit transcripts, and facsimiles of electronic student portals where campuses provide information to students about the status of their admission and enrollment.

The Task Force's work produced ten findings and nine recommendations. The Task Force believes that the findings and recommendations will serve students and the institution effectively in verifying the academic qualifications of admitted students.

Findings

1. ***Verifying students' academic qualifications for admission to the University of California is important for ensuring integrity and fairness within an admissions process that is highly competitive and for helping to ensure that new students are properly prepared for the academic rigors of the University.***

   Regents' policy and Academic Senate guidelines obligate admissions officials at each campus to secure necessary and official documents to verify the academic qualifications of all new students. This is important because applicants provide self-reported information on the undergraduate application. Regents' policy 2102 requires that "the

top one-eighth of the state's high school graduates, as well as those transfer students who have successfully completed specified college work, be eligible for admission to the University of California."[2] In addition, several Academic Senate regulations require campus admission offices to verify student's academic qualifications. For example, Chapter 2, Article 2 (420) specifies that, "Each applicant for freshman admission must arrange for the University to receive, prior to the date established by the Office of Admissions, the final official high school transcript as well as a transcript for all collegiate courses that have been attempted."[3]

2. *Campuses want to enroll the students that they admit, seeing great potential in those that they admit after having invested considerable time, effort, and resources in assessing the credentials of applicants to their campuses and identifying those students who they believe will thrive on their particular campus.*

   Campus see great potential in the students they have admitted and wish to play a role in helping selected students fulfill their potential. Campuses do not wish to withdraw the admission of a student it has spent many months encouraging to enroll in the fall. UC's comprehensive review admissions process involves an intensive and thorough evaluation, designed to best match students who will thrive at a particular campus. Following the admission offer, the campus spends considerable time and resources to encourage students to make a commitment to attend in the fall. If the student signals an intention to register in the fall, the campus makes additional investments in preparing the student for the fall term, such as scheduling the student for orientation, providing guidance on course selection and academic planning, and helping secure housing.

3. *The verification process is sometimes used as a way to manage campus enrollment and this use may communicate that student applicants are unwanted – the exact opposite of what campuses' have invested time, effort, and resources to communicate.*

   Criticism of UC Irvine's verification practices stemmed from a belief that the campus held new students to a standard that in any other year would not have been applied. As a result, UC's legitimate need to verify the academic qualifications of new students was undercut—and UC's admissions process tarnished—because of a belief that students'

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[2] Regents Policy 2102: Policy on Undergraduate Admission. Available at: http://regents.universityofcalifornia.edu/governance/policies/2102.html

[3] See UC Academic Senate Regulations, Part II (Admission), Chapter 2, Article 2 (420). Other relevant Academic Senate Regulations include can be found here: http://senate.universityofcalifornia.edu/bylaws-regulations/regulations/rpart2.html#r418.

admission was jeopardized for something other than adherence to academic qualifications needed for admission.

4. ***There are alternatives to using verification to manage enrollment.***

   Several campuses use registration "blocks" to gain the notice of students who have not responded to previous inquiries. These blocks prevent students from conducting business within the institution, such as signing-up for orientation, enrolling in classes, or applying for housing, until the student contacts the institution.

5. ***Campuses remind new students repeatedly and regularly to submit needed documents; the number and type of communications vary across the system. Unless a student makes contact with a campus, UC admission officials do not know why a student has failed to verify their academic credentials.***

   Campuses remind students of the need to submit official documents by the deadline. Though the number and type varies, these reminders begin when students submit their Statement-of-Intent-to-Register (SIR) on the campus' web portal. (Student submission of the SIR is dependent on them agreeing to send all needed academic documents by the posted deadline.)

   UC campuses send at least two e-mail reminders to students prior to the July 1 deadline. Following the July 1 deadline, campuses, on average, send an additional two e-mail reminders to students. In addition, all campuses communicate important dates and deadlines in their online student portal, as well as on admissions websites and publications, and during admitted student yield events. The student portal displays key tasks, deadlines, and messages prominently, including reminders to students to contact campus admissions offices with questions.

   Unless the student contacts the campus, UC admissions officials have no way of knowing why a student has not submitted needed documents. Typically, however, students fail to submit a transcript for three reasons: they overlooked the deadline, failed to fulfill the academic conditions of the admissions contract, or chose to attend college elsewhere or not to enroll anywhere in the fall.

6. ***Students are not in complete control when delivering documents required for verification to the University. Unless the student requests delivery proof, students and their families either do not know or do not have evidence that documents required for admissions verification have been delivered.***

Although students are responsible for requesting that transcripts and other test scores be sent to a college, only the institution of record (i.e., a high school or college) can certify and send an official transcript. Despite the fact that a student may have made a timely request, it is possible that non-receipt at a UC campus will be out of the hands of the student.[4]

7. *Confirming intention to enroll as early as possible is important for student support and academic planning purposes. Although campuses often grant extensions to admitted students in submitting required admissions verification documents, multiple extensions can actually work to the disservice of students.*

In addition to confirming the academic qualifications of new students, campuses use the verification process to prepare for the fall term. Campuses plan course offerings, housing commitments, dining services, orientation programs, and other student services based on the number of students who plan to attend the campus in the fall. The earlier a campus can confirm that a student is actually planning to attend in the fall – by meeting all conditions of admission – the more effectively it can plan for and deliver necessary academic offerings and co-curricular programs and services. Students who do not plan to enroll in the fall remain on wait lists, preventing other students from accessing such services.

UC's July 1 deadline for submission of official transcripts also benefits students, especially students who have jeopardized their admission by performing poorly in the final term of their high school or community college careers. For example, campuses may be willing to defer a student's admission to a later term if the student agrees to repeat a course and earn a higher grade. The campus may be willing to admit the student in the fall term, if the student completes a specific course at the University that demonstrates mastery of the subject or skills in question. Campuses cannot initiate these conversations, however, unless the student contacts the admission office or sends the campus an official transcript. Student and institutional options become more constrained as the fall term approaches.

8. *To provide admitted students with every chance of securing their admission, campuses look for corroborating information to confirm student intentions for the fall.*

Before withdrawing the admission of any student, campuses rely on other evidence to determine if any given student is planning to attend in the fall. For example, a campus may

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[4] The Office of the President regularly informs UC campuses of high schools, community colleges, or other organizations that may have trouble generating a transcript in time to meet UC's deadlines and instructs them to hold harmless students from these schools.

check to see if the student is planning to attend summer orientation, has signed up for student housing, has accepted their aid offer, or has attempted to enroll in classes. None of these circumstances alone verifies students' intention to enroll, but nonetheless provide helpful direction for outreach efforts. Conversely, students who have not demonstrated such affirmative behavior – and who have not submitted official documents – may be signaling that they do not intend to enroll in the fall.

9. *UC's deadlines for receipt of academic documents are aligned with deadlines required at other colleges and universities around the country. In fact, almost all new UC students verify academic credentials in a timely manner (97.5%), adhering to these deadlines.*

    Most selective postsecondary institutions in America require an official transcript and official test scores as a condition of admission to the institution. Appendix 3 provides examples of submission dates for public and private colleges and universities nationally.

10. *All campuses have processes for students to appeal if a campus has withdrawn their admission, but some are easier to navigate for students than others.*

    Although all campuses have an appeal process, instructions to students and the process for filing an appeal vary considerably from campus-to-campus. Processes tend to be more explicit at those campuses that initiate more admission withdrawals.

Task Force Recommendations & Best Practices

The Task Force believes that the credibility of the institution's admissions process depends on clarity of purposes and effectiveness of implementation with respect to these purposes. The central purposes of admissions verification are to: 1) ensure the integrity and fairness of admissions processes and 2) help ensure that new students are properly prepared for the rigors of the University.

The Task Force focused its efforts on how campuses conduct their verification processes and whether they should revise them in ways that might make the overall operation more effective for new students and the institution. Findings from this review indicate that, generally speaking, campuses make strong efforts to solicit documents from new students that are fair, but more than that, humane and thoroughgoing. Notwithstanding, the Task Force recommends several adjustments in current practice, which it believes will enhance its interactions with new students and speed the process of academic verification across the system. These recommendations represent best practices already employed by most UC campuses, as well as

universities/colleges around the country. Systemwide adherence to these practices will assure the public of greater consistency and transparency.

For Immediate Implementation for the Current Admissions Cycle:

1. *Campuses will not use the academic verification process as a way to manage campus enrollment.*

2. *All campuses will send at least two direct communications prior to the July 1 deadline.*

3. *Campuses will send notices via mail to the applicant's current postal address to encourage students to follow through on the final steps prior to enrollment.*

4. *The University will maintain a grace period after published deadlines and send a minimum of two direct reminder communications prior to taking any action on new students who have not completed the steps to enrollment.*

5. *Campuses will consider alternative practices before withdrawing a student's admission, such as placing a hold on enrollment.*

6. *Campuses will review other measures of students' enrollment commitment, such as participation in orientation, submitting a housing deposit, issuance of an I-9 and/or registration in classes, to assess their likelihood of enrolling in the fall and targeting any additional outreach efforts.*

7. *Notification of withdrawal of admission will include clear instructions and deadlines for appeals.*

For Possible Implementation Later Pending Additional Study:

8. *Expand UC's ability to accept official academic records electronically.*

9. *Send phone and/or text messages to students to remind them to check their email and/or portal for important deadlines and communications.*

APPENDIX 1
Charge: Task Force Reviewing UC's Academic Verification Process for
Undergraduate Admission

As a public institution, the University of California must maintain the integrity of its admissions process by verifying the credentials of the student it admits. UC requires official final transcripts and test scores prior to UC enrollment to ensure students have met all the conditions for admission (such as completing academic subject area requirements for freshmen or pre-major requirements for transfers) and that the last two terms' coursework were successfully completed. These records allow for placement in level-appropriate courses and ensure students do not duplicate college level work at the University. Campuses also use official transcripts and test scores to award academic credit to the student. This credit helps move the student toward University graduation in a timely manner. Additionally, the institution must also serve as an advocate for the students it admits, providing these individuals with reasonable opportunities to supply needed and necessary documentation of the academic accomplishments.

Charge

The charge of the Admissions Verification Task Force is to review and recommend policies and best practices for the academic verification process across the nine undergraduate campuses. In developing these recommendations, the Task force will:

- Consider if our current academic verification process is adequate and/or necessary or if the process should be changed and/or amended

- Consider the effectiveness and timeliness of communications to admitted students regarding the verification of official transcripts, test scores, and other documents, as well as the appeals process;

- Review whether the number and type of solicited documents can be reduced or provided in other, more effective ways;

- Review the extent to which UC's need for transcript and test score information is aligned effectively with K-12 schools', community colleges', and testing organizations' ability to generate this information;

- Assess the needs of the campuses to maintain the academic integrity of the admission process;

- Consider the adequacy of the appeals process at each campus; and

- Recommend practices that may better serve students and the institution in verifying the academic qualifications of admitted students.

The Task Force will adhere to an aggressive timeline, culminating in a report to the President and set of recommendations to be considered by the Board of Regents at its November 2017 meeting.

APPENDIX 2
Academic Verification Task Force Members

Michael T. Brown (Chair)	Provost and Executive Vice President, UCOP
Philip A. Ballinger	Associate Vice Provost, Enrollment & Undergraduate Admissions, University of Washington
Adele Brumfield	Associate Vice Chancellor, Enrollment Management, UC San Diego
Youlonda Copeland-Morgan	Vice Provost, Enrollment Management, UCLA
Emily Engelschall	Director, Undergraduate Admissions, UC Riverside
Chantelle Gil	UCSA Representative, UC Irvine
Stephen Handel	Associate Vice President, Undergraduate Admissions, UCOP
Robin Holmes-Sullivan	Vice President, Student Affairs, UCOP
Kent Hopkins	Vice President, Enrollment Services, Arizona State University
Amy Jarich	Interim Associate Vice Chancellor of Admission & Enrollment, UC Berkeley
Jenny Kao	Chief Policy Advisor, President's Executive Office, UCOP
Patricia Morales	Executive Director of Undergraduate Admissions, UC Irvine
Charles Nies	Vice Chancellor, Student Affairs, UC Merced
Lisa Przekop	Director, Undergraduate Admissions, UC Santa Barbara
Walter Robinson	Associate Vice Chancellor, Enrollment Management, UC Davis
Henry Sanchez	Chair, Board of Admissions & Relations with Schools (BOARS), UC San Francisco
Michelle Whittingham	Associate Vice Chancellor, Enrollment Management, UC Santa Cruz
Han Mi Yoon-Wu	Director, Undergraduate Admissions, UCOP Primary staff support to the Task Force

APPENDIX 3
Freshman and Transfer Student Transcript Deadlines for
Public and Private Colleges and Universities

Public Institution	Freshman Transcript Deadline	Transfer Student Transcript Deadline
Univ. of Arizona	As soon as available after graduation	After completion of last semester in progress and prior to enrollment.
California State Univ. (Systemwide)	Varies by campus: ranges from June 30 – August 12	Varies by campus: ranges from June 30 – August 19
Univ. of Florida	July 31	After completion of the last semester in progress and prior to enrollment.
U of Illinois	July 10	Final transcript: June 15
U of Michigan (Ann Arbor)	As soon as available after graduation	Due with application
SUNY (Buffalo)	As soon as available after graduation	After completion of the last semester in progress and prior to enrollment.
University of Texas (Austin)	June 1	June 1
UVA	As soon as available after graduation	After completion of the last semester in progress and prior to enrollment.
U of Washington	July 15	Final transcript: July 15
Private Institutions	**Freshman Transcript Deadline**	**Transfer Transcript Deadline**
Harvard	July 1	July 1
MIT	June 20	After completion of the last semester in progress and prior to enrollment.
Stanford	July 1	July 15
USC	July 1	After completion of the last semester in progress and prior to enrollment.