Office of the President
October 8, 2001

TO MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATIONAL POLICY:

ITEM FOR DISCUSSION

For Meeting of October 17, 2001

REPORT ON COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW IN UNDERGRADUATE ADMISSIONS

The attached papers are provided as background for an oral presentation and discussion of the Academic Senate's deliberations on the establishment of a comprehensive review process for undergraduate admissions. In addition to a status report from representatives of the Academic Senate, this session will include comments from a panel of faculty members from two UC campuses, as well as from Stanford University.

(2ndAttachment)

PROPOSED COMPREHENSIVE ADMISSIONS REVIEW AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA: BACKGROUND FOR DISCUSSION

I. Introduction

At its November 2001 meeting, the Board of Regents is scheduled to receive a proposal currently under study by the Academic Senate to implement comprehensive admissions review processes at those campuses that can admit only a portion of the UC-eligible students who apply. Representatives of the Academic Senate's Board of Admissions and Relations with Schools (BOARS) will report on the status of this proposal at the October 17 Regents meeting and gain input from the Regents.

The University of California's undergraduate admissions policy includes two major components: *eligibility* and *selection*. The requirements for *eligibility* determine who is academically qualified to attend the University of California. By definition, students meeting these requirements constitute the top 12.5% of California's high school graduates specified in the California Master Plan for Higher Education and are guaranteed admission to at least one campus of the University. However, because most UC-eligible applicants apply to several campuses, the number of eligible applicants far exceeds the available spaces at most campuses. The *selection* process encompasses the array of policies and practices that individual campuses that do not have space for all UC-eligible applicants employ to select their entering classes. In keeping with the University's commitment to the Master Plan, all UC-eligible students who are not selected at the campus(es) of their choice are admitted to at least one other UC campus.

The proposal on comprehensive admissions review pertains to campus-level *selection* from among applicants who have already met the academic requirements of eligibility. It does not change basic University eligibility criteria nor, therefore, which students are admitted to the University overall. Rather it addresses the question of the criteria and the processes the University should use in determining which eligible students are admitted at each of the selective campuses.

The purposes of this document are to describe the history of the faculty's discussion of comprehensive review, to explain how comprehensive review is defined by BOARS and how it is used at other institutions, and to list some of the important questions the implementation of more comprehensive review processes raises for the University of California.

II. Background

The immediate impetus for the Senate's consideration of comprehensive review comes from the President's request, contained in a February 15 letter to the Academic Council, that the faculty consider his recommendation that "all campuses move away from admissions processes focused on quantitative formulas and instead adopt evaluative procedures that look at applicants in a comprehensive...way."

Consideration of the President's proposal was accelerated in May as a result of two events. First, on May 9, Berkeley Chancellor Robert Berdahl, Berkeley Divisional Senate Chair

David Dowall, and faculty admissions committee Chair Calvin Moore wrote jointly to President Atkinson and the Academic Council, formally requesting an exemption from the requirement of

Regents Resolution SP-1 that campuses select 50 to 75 percent of their applicants on "academic criteria alone" (the "two-tier" policy), in order to implement a "unitary policy" that would admit all applicants to Berkeley on the same full set of criteria. The second event was the May 16

Regents' meeting, at which time the President, after consultation with Academic Council Chair Michael Cowan, wrote a letter to Lieutenant Governor Cruz Bustamante and Speaker of the Assembly Robert Hertzberg, informing them that his February recommendation was under consideration by the faculty and confirming that any changes that came out of this study "will be effective for students who matriculate in Fall 2002." In order to respond to these requests, new admissions processes must be in place for the admissions processing cycle that begins in December 2001.

In a broader sense, however, the discussion of comprehensive admissions review processes at UC began in the fall of 1995. At that time, the joint faculty-administration Task Force on Undergraduate Admissions Criteria charged with revising the University *Guidelines for Implementation of University Policy on Undergraduate Admissions* commented on the need for a review of "the methods used for assessing academic performance, beyond utilizing criteria such as GPA and standardized test scores." It also suggested that "the selection process could be altered in the future to include a more comprehensive approach to reviewing students' academic accomplishments and personal backgrounds."

In response to this recommendation, as well as to faculty concerns on individual campuses, several of the campuses over the past several years have established or expanded elements of comprehensive review in various portions of their selection processes. At this point, all selective campuses use a form of comprehensive review procedures in "Tier II," and several employ elements of comprehensive review in "Tier I" as well. The 1995 recommendations were also taken up in December 2000 at the statewide UC Freshman Admissions Policy Conference, co-chaired by the Chair of the Academic Council and the Vice President for Educational Outreach. The report of this conference urged UC to place greater emphasis on a comprehensive assessment of all applicants and to review applicants' achievements in the context of the opportunities and challenges they have experienced.

Over the course of the past months, BOARS has discussed comprehensive admissions review extensively. In June, BOARS issued a policy statement endorsing the use of comprehensive review and a preliminary set of principles to guide the planning for more comprehensive processes at campuses that cannot admit all UC-eligible applicants. These materials were endorsed by the Academic Council on July 11 and forwarded to the Academic Senate Divisional Chairs for further review at each of the campuses. Responses from the campuses were sent to BOARS on September 1. These responses have been analyzed and BOARS currently is deliberating on the issues raised by the campuses. Once this work is completed, final drafts of the definition of comprehensive review, the guiding principles, recommendations for accountability measures, and revised *Guidelines for Implementation of University Policy on Undergraduate Admissions* will be forwarded for approval to the Academic Council and the Academic Assembly in October. If the Assembly concurs with BOARS' recommendations, a final proposal on comprehensive

review will be forwarded from the President to the Board of Regents at its November meeting. Admissions directors on all of the selective campuses have been kept well informed on the progress of BOARS' discussions and are in the process of developing comprehensive review procedures that can be implemented for the review cycle that begins in mid-December.

III. What is Comprehensive Review?

At the current stage of its deliberations, BOARS defines "comprehensive review" as

> *"the process by which students applying to UC campuses are evaluated for admission using multiple measures of achievement and promise while considering the context in which each student has demonstrated academic accomplishment."*

As noted above, BOARS has crafted a set of principles to guide campuses in implementing comprehensive review. Foremost among these principles are (1) the importance given to academic criteria as the primary consideration in selecting applicants and (2) respect for individual campus flexibility and autonomy in developing and implementing campus-specific policies and practices.

The comprehensive review process currently envisioned by BOARS would leave entirely intact the fourteen selection criteria specified in the 1996 *Guidelines for Implementation of University Policy on Undergraduate Admissions*. However, the proposed guiding principles for comprehensive review represent a significant departure from the existing *Guidelines* in that they essentially call for the elimination of the "tiered" selection process. As noted above, the *Guidelines* currently require campuses to select between 50 and 75 percent of the admitted class on "academic criteria alone" and the rest on a combination of academic and "other" criteria (e.g., leadership, special talents and accomplishments in non-academic areas, etc.). The BOARS proposal would remove this requirement and encourage campuses to evaluate all eligible applicants on a broad array of academic and other criteria. Decisions on the weights of the various criteria would be within the discretion of individual campuses, with the clear understanding that academic criteria will continue to predominate.

At the same time, BOARS recognizes that individual campuses may conclude that some applicants are so highly qualified, when viewed solely in terms of their achievement on a range of academic criteria, that they would be admitted under any circumstance—in which case further review of their applications is not warranted. The BOARS proposal would allow faculty on each campus to establish specific levels of academic achievement which, if reached, would be sufficient to ensure admission. However, these would be defined by faculty-specified levels of accomplishment on multiple academic criteria, rather than as percentages of the admitted class.

BOARS' proposed guiding principles for comprehensive review also specify that campuses should review each UC-eligible applicant's file before denying that applicant; that is, no applicant would be denied based solely on performance on a narrow range of criteria or on machine-driven processes alone.

IV. How Does the BOARS Proposal Compare to the Review Processes at Other Institutions?

Virtually all colleges and universities across the country use admissions processes that, like UC's, incorporate a broad variety of criteria. The University of California stands apart from other colleges and universities in that it not only publishes and adheres to explicit requirements for eligibility that set a floor for academic qualifications, it also requires campuses that cannot admit all eligible applicants to segment their pool of qualified applicants into two groups based on different selection criteria (the current "tiered" admission system).

Historically, private institutions and selective public institutions have tended to rely on comprehensive admissions procedures that involve individualized qualitative review of the entirety of each applicant's file. Some less selective public institutions have used point-based formulaic approaches that rely more heavily on machine-driven practices, but these have come under greater scrutiny as more and more students seek entrance to colleges and universities and denial of admission is increasingly seen as a high-stakes outcome for both students and universities.

As part of its deliberations on comprehensive admissions review processes, BOARS asked staff to investigate the admissions procedures at institutions comparable to UC, including Stanford, Harvard, Yale, MIT, and the Universities of Illinois, Maryland, Michigan, North Carolina, and Wisconsin. This inventory revealed that comprehensive review processes are widely utilized by selective institutions, both public and private, including all of those listed above. Highly selective institutions use a variety of factors in selecting their entering class and do not employ a "tiered" system. In the words of the University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill, "There are no formulas or computer-generated decisions. We evaluate students on an individual basis within the context of both the student's high school and our entire applicant pool." Stanford further specifies, "Our evaluation process is extremely thorough and includes many factors. We take into consideration personal qualities—how well an individual applicant has taken advantage of available resources, whether he or she has faced and withstood adversity, and whether the applicant shows promise as a contributing community member."

V. What Issues Does the Adoption of More Comprehensive Selection Processes Raise at UC?

The potential implementation of more comprehensive review processes at UC raises a number of important questions that are being actively debated by faculty on the various campuses as well as within BOARS and the Academic Council. The most significant of these include:

- Will implementation of a comprehensive review process that eliminates the "tiered" admission system lead to an erosion of academic quality?

- Assuming that campuses implementing comprehensive review processes rely more on human judgment and less on mechanical processes, how do we guard against individual biases and maintain the integrity of our decisions?

- Will a comprehensive review process be more difficult to explain to potential students and their parents and, if so, will this lead to an erosion of public understanding and confidence?

- Has the pace of change in the area of admissions policy become too rapid to allow for sound consideration of individual changes and their cumulative effects?

- How much more will the new process cost and is this additional cost justified?

Representatives of the Academic Senate look forward to the opportunity to discuss these and other issues on October 17.

October 2001