

**Office of the President
September 20, 2004**

TO MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATIONAL POLICY:

ITEM FOR ACTION

For Meeting of September 23, 2004

**ACADEMIC SENATE RECOMMENDATION REGARDING FRESHMAN
ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS**

The President recommends that the Committee on Educational Policy recommend to The Regents that:

Consistent with the recommendations of the Board of Admissions and Relations with Schools (BOARS) adopted by the Assembly of the Academic Senate on June 30, 2004, the minimum grade point average (GPA) required for students to be Eligible in the Statewide Context or Eligible in the Local Context shall be increased to 3.0 effective for freshmen entering the University in Fall 2007.

BACKGROUND

Summary

Under the tenets of the California Master Plan for Higher Education, the University of California is expected to set freshman eligibility criteria so that the top one-eighth of California public high school graduates achieve eligibility. In May 2004, the California Postsecondary Education Commission (CPEC) issued the findings of its most recent eligibility study, which indicated that 14.4 percent of 2003 graduates of California public high schools met UC's current eligibility requirements. In response, at the July 14, 2004 meeting, the Board of Regents adopted changes (described below under "additional background") to the eligibility criteria to become effective for students applying in Fall 2005. They also deferred action on an increase in the minimum GPA to become effective for students applying in Fall 2007 to allow time for further analysis and discussion.

The version of Item 304 that was included in The Regents' agenda packet for the September meeting recommended that the minimum GPA required for UC eligibility be increased to a level "not to exceed 3.1," effective for students entering as freshmen in Fall 2007. This amended item

recommends that The Regents set a minimum required GPA of 3.0, effective for Fall 2007. In addition, the President intends to request that, as data on the new tests that will be required effective Fall 2006 become available, BOARS conduct additional analysis and return with additional recommendations, if needed, to align the size of UC's eligibility pool to a figure consistent with the Master Plan. The implementation of any such changes will be timed so as to give appropriate notice to students then in high school.

The additional discussion and analysis that have ensued since the July meeting underscore questions originally raised in the Senate's June report about the difficulty of projecting precise eligibility rates when substantial changes will be made to the University's test requirements in 2006. The inability at this time to project precisely the numeric effects of an increase in the GPA to 3.1 raises the possibility that UC could "overshoot" its Master Plan target, thereby denying access to students who should be eligible. This was not the intent of BOARS nor the Academic Senate, which viewed the 3.1 GPA minimum as a ceiling. These concerns, together with the error bands incorporated in the CPEC eligibility rate findings, suggest that the recommendation The Regents adopt should contain sufficient flexibility to allow for it to be adjusted prior to implementation, in order to avoid inadvertently denying access. For these reasons, the earlier version of this recommendation incorporated flexible language regarding the new minimum GPA ("not to exceed 3.1").

At the same time, the University must be concerned with its responsibility to provide potential applicants both maximum clarity and sufficient notice with respect to UC eligibility requirements. These concerns argue against an action that incorporates flexible language or refers to additional, but currently unspecified, changes that would be adopted in the next two years and still become effective for Fall 2007. This amended recommendation proposes setting a clear standard of 3.0 for students entering in Fall 2007. Current data indicate this change would reduce the size of UC's eligibility pool to 12.8 percent of California public high school graduates.

Additional Background

University policy specifies that, consistent with the Master Plan, high school graduates who meet UC's eligibility requirements are guaranteed a place at UC, although not necessarily at the campus, nor in the major, of their choice. Thus the University of California's eligibility criteria determine who is admissible to the UC system as a whole. Individual campuses then select those applicants they wish to admit based on additional criteria and the comprehensive review process. Changes to eligibility criteria do not affect comprehensive review or campus-level selection procedures. (To provide perspective on the qualifications of UC applicants, 75 percent of eligible applicants present GPAs of 3.5 or above. To be eligible with the current minimum GPA of 2.8, applicants must earn an average score of 580 across the five required admission tests.)

Students currently have three paths to gain eligibility for admission to UC: Eligibility in the Statewide Context, Eligibility in the Local Context (ELC), and Eligibility by Examination Alone. UC's eligibility criteria rely on five measures of academic preparation: completion of the "a-g" pattern of required college preparatory courses that are also required for entrance to the

California State University; the GPA achieved in the “a-g” courses taken during the sophomore and junior years; scores on standardized college admission tests; UC’s Eligibility Index (a sliding scale that allows applicants to balance lower grades with higher test scores, and vice versa, to achieve eligibility); and a student’s ranking within his or her high school class, based on the UC-computed GPA in “a-g” courses.

The University’s Eligibility and Admissions Study Group recommended in March 2004 that after the CPEC eligibility findings became available in May, BOARS should be prepared to make recommendations to The Regents in July 2004 regarding changes that would align the size of UC’s eligibility pool with the Master Plan. To arrive at these recommendations, BOARS simulated a range of changes in each of UC’s eligibility programs and criteria and looked at the effects of each. The Senate’s recommendations focused on preserving high academic achievement and likely success at UC, while also maintaining access for high-achieving students from a breadth of different backgrounds (including students from schools with high concentrations of low-income and first-generation college students and students from racial and ethnic groups that are currently underrepresented in UC’s eligibility pool). Overall, the simulations conducted by BOARS showed that raising the GPA required of students is the most effective means of increasing the academic quality of the eligibility pool and mitigating reductions in access for populations that are already underserved at UC.

The Academic Senate recommended that changes to the eligibility criteria be adopted in two phases. The following procedural changes, which were adopted by the Board at the July meeting for implementation for the class entering in Fall 2005, would bring the projected size of UC’s eligibility pool to 13 percent.

1. The GPA calculation for statewide eligibility was changed so that a student’s GPA reflects his or her performance in all “a-g” courses completed in the tenth and eleventh grades. As this change was made for ELC-eligible students two years ago, this recommendation provides greater consistency between these two paths to eligibility.
2. The ELC program was revised to require that, to achieve final UC eligibility, graduates identified as ELC at the beginning of their senior year complete UC’s course and testing requirements by the end of their senior year (also consistent with statewide eligibility).

In addition, the Senate recommended that if further reductions to the pool were needed to achieve the Master Plan target, the minimum required GPA should be raised from 2.8 to 3.1, effective for students seeking admission to the Fall 2007 freshman class. At the July meeting, the Board voted to defer action on the increase in the minimum GPA pending further discussion and review of data concerning the effects of the change. This amended recommendation addresses issues raised during this additional discussion and analysis.