

## President's proposal would broaden process

By Tanya Schevitz  
CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

The University of California Regents will discuss a controversial proposal today that would institute a broad definition of merit in its admissions process.

Currently, campuses are required to admit at least half of their students based purely on academic criteria — grades, scores, and classes taken. The proposal would allow such factors as athletics, community service and socioeconomic background to be considered as well.

Although critics say it would lower UC's standards, UC President Richard Atkinson said the "comprehensive review" process that he has recommended is similar to those used by elite private colleges and universities.

"We want to move away from a formula-driven admissions process, one that simply adds up numbers and looks at grades and test scores, to one that looks at the pattern of achievement, the interests of the students and the like," Atkinson said recently to members of the State Board of Education in Sacramento.

The new policy, which is being studied by the faculty, will come to the regents for final approval in November.

It would allow campuses not only to consider special talents

► See **POLICY**: Page A15 Col 2

# UC admissions policy again on regents' minds

## UC regents to debate 'comprehensive' admissions

► **POLICY**  
From Page A13

and interests, but also to evaluate all academic accomplishments in light of the applicant's socioeconomic background and academic opportunities. That would benefit students who have demonstrated initiative and promise by making the most of their educational opportunities, according to UC

Even though many elite private schools do look at similar factors in admissions, critics say, UC is responsible to the public.

"People want some assurance that the process is predictable and that there is something objective against which their children will be measured," said Regent Ward Connerly, who was one of the architects of the state's 1996 voter-approved ban on affirmative action. "The fatal flaw is that this removes that level of objectivity."

He said the issue would open the university to lawsuits, espe-

*"We want to move  
away from a  
formula-driven  
admissions process  
... to one that  
looks at the pattern  
of achievement."*

RICHARD ATKINSON  
University of California president

cially if admission of members of minority groups increases, because admissions decisions will be less defensible.

"You are injecting race into the equation through the back door," Connerly said.

UC has been struggling to in-

crease enrollment of underrepresented minorities at its two elite campuses — UC Berkeley and UCLA — without affirmative action.

Although UC Berkeley has adhered to the 50 percent rule, admitting half of each class on academics, since 1998 it has considered an applicant's achievement with regard to the opportunities that were available to them.

David Benjamin, who runs a test-preparation business in Irvine, said the comprehensive process used now by Berkeley makes it easier for certain ethnic groups to gain admission.

For example, in 2000, about 17 percent of African Americans with a 3.5 to 3.59 grade point

average were accepted to the freshman class. Chicanos with the same GPA were accepted at 8.3 percent rate. Only 4.6 percent of white applicants with that GPA were accepted and only 1.3 percent of Asians.

The same disparity shows up with SAT scores, where 1600 is a perfect score. While Latino and Chicano applicants who had a 900 to 999 SAT score were admitted at a 19 percent rate, white and Asian students had to score 1200 to 1299 to have the same chance at a slot in the freshman class.

"I could understand taking a small number of underprivileged students — but if the gaps are that big, then I start to think some-

thing is going on," Benjamin said. Admissions experts say that basing admissions decisions on numbers alone, however, does not necessarily yield a class that best serves the university or society.

"There are a number of people who apply with 1600 SATs and high GPAs who are not going to get in," said Roger Banks, senior admissions officer at Harvard University, which admitted 2,100 of about 19,000 applicants this year. "You have other students with modest standardized tests but who excel in other areas, athletics, music, journalism and attractive personal features."

E-mail Tanya Schevitz at  
tshevitz@sfchronicle.com

DH20015671E1

A13

Oct 17, 2001  
★★★★★ San Francisco Chronicle A15

# UC regents ask for research on admissions plan

## Some see threat to standards

By Tanya Schevitz  
CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

The University of California Board of Regents questioned yesterday whether a proposal to dramatically change UC's admissions process would result in an erosion of standards.

Currently, each campus admits between 50 and 75 percent of its applicants purely on academic criteria — grades, scores and classes taken. The rest are admitted looking at such factors as athletics, community service and socioeconomic background. The controversial — “comprehensive review” would extend those considerations to all students.

The regents, who met yesterday at the Laurel Heights campus of UC San Francisco, will vote on the proposal in November.

Despite critics' concern that replacing the current system with comprehensive assessment could lower academic standards and inject race into the process, the proposal appears likely to pass.

“We are really doing a sea change and it will be difficult. But because it is difficult does not mean we shouldn't do it, because it will get us to the best pool of students,” said Regent Sherry Lansing.

But many regents said before the next meeting, they want their questions researched and the answers reported back to them.

Their concern is that the new process would be subjective and thus difficult to explain to students who are rejected.

“How do we ensure, for students who go to high school and stay up late to study, that it is worth it?” Regent Ward Connerly asked. “We want well-rounded students, but we are not the Rotary Club. I think the emphasis should be on scholarship.”

Comprehensive review would not affect which students are eligible for UC, but it could play a significant role in which students are admitted to which campus. UC has been struggling to increase enrollment of underrepresented minorities at its two elite campuses — UC Berkeley and UCLA — without affirmative action.

UC Berkeley Professor Jack Citrin told the regents of a middle-class Asian student who is a musical prodigy with stellar grades and a 1450 SAT score. The boy was rejected from Berkeley, which adheres to the 50 percent rule but considers academic achievements in the context of a student's background. He now attends Harvard.

“Clearly, the motivation is to find a way to bring about a different racial, ethnic and socio-economic distribution of students,” Citrin said. “Comprehensive review enhances the role of subjectivity ... and unsubstantiated theories in selection decisions.”

Connerly, Citrin and others fear that the new process would favor certain currently underrepresented ethnic groups, primarily African Americans, Latinos and American Indians.

Under the proposal, each campus would be able to develop its own policies, following basic guidelines.

UC Davis has already developed a preliminary plan to use a formula that includes everything from grades and test scores to community service, leadership and opportunity, assigning scores to each criteria.

At UC Berkeley, the plan is to consider applicants in a broader context of merit, without a formula.

Regents yesterday questioned how the new process would be paid for. Additional employees would be required to administer it, and the university already is struggling fund its programs.

Many regents were also concerned that despite the greater subjectivity of the process, faculty would not be involved in reading the applications.

UC San Francisco Professor Dorothy Perry, chairwoman of UC's Board of Admissions and Relations with Schools, said that even if faculty members are not reading applications, they are deeply involved in developing the admissions process.

“Merit can be demonstrated in many ways and it does vary by the opportunities available to students,” she said. “We want to look at all information in a file.”

But Regent Velma Montoya said she had heard from members of the faculty who did not know the proposal was to go before the regents.

And Regent Sue Johnson said she was concerned by the fast pace of change. The issue was seriously proposed only last spring and if approved would take effect for students entering next fall.

“This is not the normal university process. We are slow and deliberative. I'm concerned about it,” she said. “I don't think we should be in any rush.”

E-mail Tanya Schevitz at  
tschevitz@sfchronicle.com.