

UC widens chance of gaining admission

Policy approved to aid minorities, disadvantaged

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The University of California Board of Regents approved a dramatic change to the university's admissions policy yesterday that is expected to increase enrollments of disadvantaged and minority students.

The "dual admissions" program, which comes six years after UC banned affirmative action, is the latest in a series of proposals by UC President Richard Atkinson to expand ways for more students — particularly African American, Latino and Native American students — to gain access to the university.

It is the first of its kind in the nation at a prestigious university.

"It is a good step to make sure students who should be eligible for UC, and just need a little help, get the opportunity," said Joni Finney, vice president of the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education. "This should have been done a long time ago."

Under the new program, students near the top of their class who do not meet UC's qualifications when they graduate from high school will for the first time

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Numbers game

Under the new policy, UC will admit:

■ **The top 4 percent** of students at any given high school.

■ **The top 12.5 percent** of students at all high schools statewide.

■ **Students who don't make the top 4 percent** at any given high school but are in the top 12.5 percent at that school will be admitted simultaneously to a community college and a UC campus. Upon completing certain requirements, they can transfer automatically before their junior year.

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be admitted both to a UC campus and a community college. If they complete UC's freshman and sophomore requirements and earn a grade point average specified by the campus, they will complete their studies at UC and graduate with a UC degree.

But Regents Chairwoman Sue Johnson voted against the plan because she believes the university is moving too quickly with its admissions changes.

"It goes back to our whole access-versus-excellence issue that we are struggling with," Johnson said. "I feel pushed."

A connection to UC

The program is intended to improve UC's transfer rate from community colleges and create new opportunities for students who previously would not have been qualified and believed UC was out of reach.

"Being able to be admitted from the start to UC is very important to a lot of students and their families," said Thomas Nussbaum, chancellor of California's 108 community colleges. "Knowing that they have a connection to that university from the start is very much a motivation."

The numbers of disadvantaged, and minority students on campus have been an issue since 1995, when the regents voted to ban racial preferences throughout the UC system. While the regents rescinded that ban in May, Proposition 209 — which was approved in 1996 and effectively duplicated and broadened the regents' ban — is still in place.

"This educational level should be open to everyone," said Regent Odessa Johnson. "It will allow (students) to be successful in a smaller environment first so they establish themselves as strong students."

The program will comply with the law by being available to all students who meet academic eligibility requirements.

Last year, UC started guaranteeing admission to the top 4 percent of each high school class to ensure that it was reaching students from disadvantaged high schools.

The university's faculty is also reviewing a proposal by Atkinson to replace the controversial SAT I, an aptitude test, with an achievement test. In addition, he has called for every campus to consider students' achievements in the context of their socioeconomic background and opportunities in admissions.

Both proposals are expected to come back to the regents for their consideration next year.

The Dual Admissions Program, which was approved on a 14-to-3 vote, is expected to go into effect for the class applying for fall 2003.

Several regents initially expressed opposition to the plan during a discussion Wednesday because of concerns about student quality, uncertain funding and campus resources. They were reassured, however, that students would have to meet existing academic requirements.

And after the chair of the faculty's Academic Council asked for a vote of confidence that the faculty could resolve the issues before the plan was implemented, most of the opponents shifted their stance and voted for it.

Streamlining the path to UC

Currently, in addition to accepting the top 4 percent from each high school, UC accepts the top 12.5 percent of all high school graduates in the state. The new program will be open to students between the top 4 percent and 12.5 percent at each high school in the state, expanding the current eligibility pool by 10,000 to 12,000 students a year.

UC has been lagging in its goal of increasing community college transfers from 10,100 in 2000 to 15,300 by 2005. UC hopes the new plan would add another 1,500 to 3,500 students a year.

A key component of the program will be streamlining the transfer path, which is now often murky and confusing. UC will

place its own counselors on community college campuses and lay out a specific path for each student.

"Students who otherwise may not have gone to the university could or will because they will know exactly what is required," said Warren Fox, executive director of the California Postsecondary Education Commission. "We have so many students headed for higher education and such a diverse population that it is an important new path."

State community college Chancellor Nussbaum said he will work with Atkinson to ensure that each of the 108 community colleges have the courses to meet UC's transfer requirements.

"It helps for the students and their parents to know that there is some entitlement to do some work at a UC," Nussbaum said. "It is part of a long, hard series of efforts to increase transfers."

While Nussbaum believes that the regents' action was "color-blind," he expects that it will improve the enrollment of underrepresented minorities.

"Many students because of financial or other reasons may choose to go to community college for the first two years," he said. "And the students with less money in this state tend to be students of color."

Winners and losers under admissions plan

Underrepresented minorities are currently 36 percent of transfer students and about 17 percent of freshmen. Estimates by the University of California about the "dual admissions" pool indicate that:

- 22 percent of students will come from rural schools, compared with 12 percent currently in the freshman eligibility pool.
- 39 percent from urban schools versus 41 percent currently
- 39 percent from suburban schools, compared with 47 percent now.
- More than half of the students in the expected pool will report parental income of \$35,000 per year or less, compared with 36 percent of current UC transfers and 29 percent of current UC freshmen.
- About 40 percent of the pool will be white.
- About 29 percent Latino.
- About 18 percent Asian American.
- About 6 percent African American.
- About 1 percent American Indian.
- About 6 percent will be other/unknown ethnicities.

Source: University of California

Program unfunded

However, he shared the concern of some regents that the state's funding may not be there to support the program and the steep UC enrollment growth expected over the next decade.

The program will cost about \$2.5 million a year, but that funding was pulled from UC's budget in legislative conference committee. UC expects the funding to be proposed in a separate bill soon.

Regents David Lee and Peter Preuss, said yesterday that they supported the program, but they were concerned that it would further strain the university's resources as it struggles to accommodate a huge influx of students. "There's not enough money, there's not enough campuses, there's not enough classrooms to handle it," Lee said.

In other developments yesterday, the regents were told that the picture for the university's budget over the next year is fairly bleak.

Although the state's budget proposal includes a 5 percent increase over last year's \$3.2 billion for UC's general fund, UC has lost at least \$90 million in extra money it expected, UC's vice president for budgets Larry Hershman told the regents.

A boost promised for faculty salary increases was slashed, as was money to reduce student-faculty ratios from 18-to-1, and additional funding for maintenance, instructional equipment and libraries. Some regents even said that if the tight times continue next year and the state doesn't come up with full funding for faculty raises in the 2002-2003 budget, UC may even have to consider increasing student fees.

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