

# UC regents ask for research on admissions plan

## Some see threat to standards

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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 socioeconomic 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.”

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