

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



Vancouver Senate Admissions Committee
c/o
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April 28, 2008

To: Vancouver Senate
From: Vancouver Senate Admissions Committee
Re: Application of Principles of Effective Undergraduate Admission to UBC: BC Provincial Examinations as Admission Requirements (approval)

Motion 1: *That the report of the Admissions Committee on “Application of Principles of Effective Undergraduate Admission to UBC: BC Provincial Examinations as Admission Requirements” be received.*

Motion 2: *That the policy of requiring provincial exam results from BC high school applicants be discontinued, effective the 2009 UBC Vancouver Admission Cycle; and that the corresponding Calendar statement be approved.*

APPLICATION OF PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE UNDERGRADUATE ADMISSION TO UBC: BC PROVINCIAL EXAMINATIONS AS ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS

The Vancouver Senate voted in December 2007 to continue to require BC high school applicants to write four grade-twelve provincial exams. The UBC V Calendar statement (<http://www.students.ubc.ca/calendar/index.cfm?tree=2,22,63,0>) seems clear on first reading: “The admission average will be calculated on English 12 and the three additional approved examinable Grade 12 courses or the equivalent...All courses must be completed by June. Final examinations offered by the BC Ministry of Education...must be written”. Applying the newly defined “Principles of Effective Undergraduate Admission to UBC”, the Admissions Committee analyzed the policy and found that too many principles are being violated to support its continuation.

- First, although there would be fairness if all admission decisions were made once the final grades were available for all applicants for all courses, with the current practice of admitting students in the spring, some applicants are assessed on a combination of final grades (i.e., school and provincial exam components) while others are judged on school grades alone simply because of the nature of the particular school systems they attend.
- Second, there is an implied date for admission decisions to be finalized, i.e., in the summer when the results of the provincial exams written in June become available, which does not serve the needs of either the applicant in making plans or the university in managing instructional resources (people and space) and ultimately in meeting its commitment to government.
- Third, there is a lack of transparency because there is no indication of how the marks on the provincial examinations will be used in determining admissibility to the university. Applicants are left guessing and the lack of certainty could deter some from pursuing their application.
- Fourth, the restriction of the choice of courses to be included in the calculation of the admission average to only four, all with provincial exams (in itself a more nebulous requirement now that most of those exams have been made optional for high school graduation), may be artificially limiting intellectual exploration in both the schools and the university. As well, some university programs may be missing a chance to select students who have had a particularly appropriate high school education because the courses involved are not currently acceptable for admission purposes.

Grades are not final until both the school component and the provincial exam are completed; the provincial exam result counts for 40% of the final grade. All high school students eligible to apply to UBC will complete their courses and write their last provincial exams in June and the final results become



available through the Ministry of Education sometime in late July or early August. At first glance, the *principle of fairness* would seem to dictate that all BC high school applicants be evaluated in the summer when all of them have comparable sets of final course grades. However, some would argue that there is unfairness in comparing even those final grades because students are allowed to repeat a provincial exam, a course, or both in the hopes of raising the grade. Consequently, for some students, final grades reflect the outcome of two exposures to a course, which disadvantages the applicant who presents grades from only one exposure.

For several years UBC V has attempted in different ways to implement the *principle of timeliness*, whereby applicants who report their grades on-line in March and April may soon afterward receive a “firm” offer of admission (see below for a discussion of what “firm” might mean to a student). Another group of applicants receives offers in May after the Ministry of Education reports grades electronically to the Undergraduate Admissions Office. How fair is the evaluation of applicants’ grades in March, April, or May? Several aspects of the school system contribute to perceived or real unfairness. First, some students write provincial exams in grade eleven and may therefore have some final grades to report at the start of their grade-twelve year along with interim (i.e., incomplete, school-assessed) grades for other courses. Other students who may have some final grades to report by March are those attending semestered schools where courses that started in September are examined in January. However, those same students may not have a grade in a key admission requirement (English 12, for example) early enough to be considered for the early offers of admission. UBC may be losing some excellent students because of a rigid adherence to a requirement for grades in specific provincially examinable courses. Finally, a relatively new phenomenon has arisen whereby students take courses on-line through a Ministry-sanctioned, distributed or distance learning system rather than in a traditional school; which grade is reported to the Ministry of Education by May has been a source of variability. There are concerns about the comparability of some of the “school-based” grades being reported from distributed learning “colleges” to those from regular schools. In summary, the grades on which the majority of applicants are assessed are a mixture of interim, final, and repeated grades so it is difficult to argue that fairness is being achieved.

How the offers of admission made from March to June have been treated by the university in recent years brings us to the *principle of integrity*, i.e., the concurrence of policy and practice, and the *principle of transparency*. Until two or three years ago, most programs set a final cut-off average, and applicants who were offered early admission had the offer withdrawn if their final grade was below the cut. Some discretion was used, mainly to achieve the desired final enrolment target. By mid-summer, when final high school grades are available, most of the students UBC hopes to enrol have already made a decision to attend elsewhere and so new offers to them are both an affront and an ineffectual tool for enrolment management.

More recently, many programs have put more weight on the *principles of commitment and timeliness*, and have become more reluctant to revoke offers unless applicants’ final grades had dropped drastically from the grades on which their early offers were based (remembering that those grades may have included both final and interim grades). In effect, the results of the June provincial exams became a much smaller factor in the decision to admit many students but there has been much variation in the way that students admitted to different programs have been treated. The decision by the Provost’s office in 2007 to ban the practice of revocation of offers to students who maintained the University’s published minimum standards brought these discrepancies into full light. The resulting change in practice has not been matched by a change in published policy which still requires that the provincial exam be written. We are now seen to lack nimbleness, unable to act with integrity because our published policies do not conform to our practice, and unable to provide applicants with a transparent process to follow.

CONCLUSION

The Admissions Committee recommends that the policy of requiring provincial exam results from BC high school applicants be discontinued for entry beginning in summer 2009 because it restricts UBC’s ability to adhere to principles of fairness, timeliness, integrity, commitment and transparency, all of which should underpin an offer of admission.



UBC Undergraduate Admissions Proposal Form Change to Admission Requirements

<p>Department: Undergraduate Admissions</p> <p>SAC Approval Date: April 23, 2008</p> <p>Effective Session: 2009 Admission Cycle</p>	<p>Date: April 23, 2008</p> <p>Contact Person: Deborah Robinson, Associate Registrar & Director, Student Recruitment, Admissions and Awards. Phone: 604-822-2953 Email: deborah.robinson@ubc.ca</p>
<p>Proposed Calendar Entry:</p> <p>II. Admissions <u>Applicants Following the BC/Yukon Secondary School Curriculum</u> > Admission Requirements</p> <p>The minimum academic qualification for admission is secondary school graduation from a recognized secondary school, including the following Grade 11 and 12 courses:</p> <p>[... table appears here ...]</p> <p>The admission average will be calculated on English 12 and the three additional examinable Grade 12 courses or the equivalent.</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>Beginning in 2009, applicants will not be required to write the final examinations offered by the BC Ministry of Education (BC Provincial Examinations) other than those required for graduation. For admission decisions, BC Provincial Examination results will be used if the examination result increases the applicant's admission average.</p> <p>All courses must be completed by June. Summer school courses or grades obtained in supplemental examinations will not be considered.</p> <p>[...]</p>	<p>URL: http://www.students.ubc.ca/calendar/index.cfm?tree=2,22,63,0</p> <p>Present Calendar Entry:</p> <p>II. Admissions <u>Applicants Following the BC/Yukon Secondary School Curriculum</u> > Admission Requirements</p> <p>[93] The minimum academic qualification for admission is secondary school graduation from a recognized secondary school, including the following Grade 11 and 12 courses:</p> <p>[... table appears here ...]</p> <p>The admission average will be calculated on English 12 and the three additional approved examinable Grade 12 courses or the equivalent.</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>[98] All courses must be completed by June. Final examinations offered by the BC Ministry of Education or the external examinations for International Baccalaureate and Advanced Placement courses must be written. Summer school courses or grades obtained in supplemental examinations will not be considered.</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>Type of Action:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Remove the BC Provincial Examination requirement. 2. Outline how optional BC Provincial Examination results will be used if students elect to take them. 3. Remove reference to International



	<p>Baccalaureate (IB) and Advanced Placement (AP) exams. These requirements are outlined under a separate calendar entry: “Applicants with International Baccalaureate and Advanced Placement Courses” (http://www.students.ubc.ca/calendar/index.cfm?tree=2,279,0,0).</p> <p>Rationale: This calendar change reflects the finding of the Senate Admissions Subcommittee on the Review of UBC Undergraduate Admission Policies that “too many [Undergraduate Admission] principles are being violated to support a continuation of the policy [to require the BC Provincial Exams for admission].”</p>
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