

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



Vancouver Senate Admissions Committee
c/o
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April 28, 2008

To: Vancouver Senate
From: Admissions Committee
Re: Review of UBC Undergraduate Admission Policies: Principles of Effective Undergraduate Admission to UBC (approval)

Motion: *That the report of the Admissions Committee on “Review of UBC Undergraduate Admission Policies: Principles of Effective Undergraduate Admission to UBC” be received and that the principles for effective undergraduate admission to UBC recommended therein be approved.*

At the December 2007 meeting of the Vancouver Senate, the Admissions Committee was directed to “undertake a review of UBC’s undergraduate admission policies with a view to determining their efficacy in meeting the goals of Trek 2010 and the UBC Academic Plan and report back to the Senate no later than December 2008 with recommendations on any necessary changes”. The report presented herein completes the reporting responsibility delegated to the Admissions Committee. If approved by Senate, the principles presented in the report would guide any subsequent review of admission policies and practices, and also guide policy-makers as they prepare new admission policies in the future.

The composition and terms of reference of the Admissions Subcommittee on the Review of UBC Undergraduate Admission Policies were as follows:

Composition:

- Dr. Bruce Dunwoody, Associate Dean, Faculty of Applied Science
- Dr. Paul Harrison, Joint Faculties Senator, Faculty of Science (Chair)
- Dr. Michael MacEntee, Senator, Faculty of Dentistry
- Mr. William McNulty, Convocation Senator
- Mr. Raymond Pan, Student Senator at-large, Faculty of Science
- Ms. Deborah Robinson, Associate Registrar & Director, Student Recruitment, Admissions & Awards, Enrolment Services
- Ms. Rosalie Vlaar, Senior Policy Analyst, Student Recruitment, Admissions & Awards, Enrolment Services
- Ms. Amandeep Mann (non-voting, Secretary)

Terms of Reference:

- 1) *To undertake a review of UBC’s undergraduate admission policies with a view to determining their efficacy in meeting the goals of Trek 2010 and the UBC Academic Plan.*
- 2) *To deliver to the Admissions Committee an oral status report on the activities of the Subcommittee at the March 2008 meeting of the Committee.*
- 3) *To submit to the Admissions Committee, via the Senate Secretariat, a final report with recommendations not later than April 23, 2008.*



The subcommittee fulfilled its mandate and its work forms the basis of this report to Senate, which summarizes the disjunction between UBC's goals for recruiting excellent students and some of its current policies and practices and then suggests principles that should underpin an effective set of admission policies. Corollaries to those principles are provided as a guide to the review of policies and practices to follow. Although the individual senates of the UBC V and UBC O campuses determine their own admission policies, it will be important for further discussions to include both campuses, if only to establish which policies will be in common and which will reflect the different mandates of the two campuses.

ANALYSIS: POLICY VS. TREK GOALS

The Subcommittee reviewed documents and received oral input from the Undergraduate Admissions Office that helped to foster a discussion of the challenges and barriers to effective recruitment that are present in UBC's current practices. An earlier report on the BC provincial exam issue that formed the basis of a recommendation from the Admissions Committee to Senate in December 2007 also identified aspects of current practices that require review. Those practices have evolved from some that worked well when UBC recruited undergraduates almost entirely from BC high schools at a time when the school system was more uniformly structured and sequenced, and there was an excess of qualified applicants for most programs, the majority of whom saw UBC as their first (or only) choice for post-secondary education. Now BC schools are more variable in the way they structure the school year, with many more schools operating on a semester system than in the past, and the provincial exam system is more complex, with some exams mandatory in years prior to grade twelve and only one now mandatory in the final year. Further, UBC now aspires not only to serve BC but also to be a leading national and global university and so has to learn how to adapt its admission policies not only within BC but also to other educational jurisdictions. Finally, competition for the kind of students that UBC wants to attract has become more intense, within BC, across Canada, and over the globe. Reaction within the Undergraduate Admissions Office to that evolving landscape has resulted in new practices without a concomitant review of policy, and has led to periodic jurisdictional disagreements among the staff in the Admissions Office, representatives of faculties and Senate, and senior administration.

A search for principles on which to base a set of admission policies and practices should start with the University's overall goals. President Toope has argued that UBC should be recognized as the preeminent research-intensive university in the province and be supported financially so that it can become one of the world's great universities. To support that goal, our admission policies should ensure that the institution "...attracts and retains the best undergraduate and graduate students from across BC, Canada and the world" (Trek 2010, <http://www.trek2000.ubc.ca/principles/index.html>). Currently there are enough spaces in the BC post-secondary system to satisfy the needs of high school graduates but not enough spaces at UBC V for all who might apply. We may presume that students predisposed to take advantage of the kinds of opportunities that UBC hopes to offer them - in terms of academic challenge, involvement in research, service activities, and international exposure - will also be the most successful undergraduates and the most engaged alumni. Thinking along that line may provide some guidance on the development of principles for how the admission process should work to our advantage, for example by fitting admission criteria to both student accomplishments and the requirements for success in UBC programs.

Many current admission policies and practices may be keeping us from achieving our goals and a few are presented here. First, a desire to attract more students from other provinces may be hindered by the practice of equating school grades to a BC-derived standard without reference to the actual performance of students from different provinces at UBC. There are some data available, e.g., of performance in mathematics, that could inform the development of differentiated scales. Second, attracting good students from colleges outside BC and from other universities is difficult when UBC cannot inform applicants about the UBC equivalencies of the courses they have taken. We need a comprehensive, centrally maintained database. Third, with students being recruited from around the world there are opportunities for UBC faculties and schools to tailor their admission requirements to take advantage of the strengths and peculiarities



of local education systems but many UBC programs have not found ways to support the extensive use of broader-based admission. Fourth, it is imperative that UBC be able to present to prospective students a unified recruitment message and a common set of application processes, lest we confuse and discourage applicants at a time when they do not yet know much about UBC and can easily be influenced by clearer offers of admission from our competitors. Currently UBC does not integrate well enough the admission, housing, and scholarship components of a comprehensive offer. Last, although most students are, in effect, admitted to UBC on interim grades, it has been our tradition to wait for final grades to confirm offers. Increasingly, final grades do not become available until well after most applicants have been given firm and attractive offers of admission from other institutions.

It is still true that the majority of undergraduates admitted to UBC were schooled in the BC system and it is important to remember that UBC's admission requirements directly influence both the BC education system and individual student behaviour. For example, the continued presence of foreign language instruction in BC high schools is partly due to UBC's requirement of a second language for BC high school applicants. Any change in UBC's admission policy and practice should consider the effect on the BC education system and on individual student behaviour but change that could enhance recruitment of excellent students from any jurisdiction should not be avoided just because of its potential effects locally.

The examples above were sufficient evidence that UBC's admission practices needed a review but first it is necessary to define a set of principles. Principles can be used to test policies and practices to ensure that they are helping to meet the university's goals. The principles are presented below together with corollary statements that could guide any subsequent review of admission policies and practices, and we recommend them to Senate for approval.

PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE UNDERGRADUATE ADMISSION TO UBC

ALIGNMENT WITH UBC'S GOALS:

- Admission policies should ensure that the institution "...*attracts and retains the best undergraduate and graduate students from across BC, Canada and the world*" (Trek 2010). Such students should be predisposed to take advantage of the opportunities to seek academic challenge, to do research, to develop leadership skills, to do community service, to foster global awareness, and to participate in sports and the fine and performing arts.

Corollary: Policies or practices that discourage the enrolment of top-quality students should be identified and reviewed.

Corollary: Where two or more principles are in conflict, the resolution should always aim to achieve the overall goals of the University.

EVIDENCE-BASED POLICY REVIEW:

- Admission criteria will be based on knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of educational systems world-wide and of student performance at UBC.
- Corollary:* Student achievement at UBC will be used regularly to review and modify admission policies and practices, and to identify areas of potential improvement in UBC curricula and pedagogy.
- Corollary:* The University needs the ability to forecast changes in demand for programs so that policies can be adapted within this framework of principles.



EXCELLENCE OF FIT:

- Evaluation criteria will aim to identify those applicants who are most likely to prosper at the University of British Columbia.

Corollary: General university admission criteria shall identify where possible common core academic requirements for admission to all undergraduate programs.

Corollary: Admission criteria for specific UBC programs shall be based on the framework of the general admission criteria.

Corollary: In addition to evidence of academic achievement, diverse admission criteria may be used (i.e., broader-based admission).

FAIRNESS:

- Applicants will not be disadvantaged by the structure (timing, sequencing, grading schemes) of the educational system followed that provides the basis of admission.

Corollary: Fair and equitable treatment of applicants does not require the application of identical policies and practices because to do so would be to ignore the different educational backgrounds and needs of prospective students.

Corollary: What is considered sufficient evidence of readiness to succeed may differ for different academic programs.

Corollary: Grading schemes should not be equated to the BC high school system unless data on student performance support such a practice.

Corollary: Applicants who are continuing UBC students wishing to change program should not be disadvantaged as long as they are in good academic standing in their current program.

INTEGRITY:

- Admission practices should conform to policies.

TRANSPARENCY:

- Admission requirements should be clear and understandable to prospective students, counsellors, and others who influence student choice.

Corollary: The University will be openly direct in its communication of admission policies and practices.

TIMELINESS:

- An offer will be made in time for the applicant to plan for the transition to UBC and for UBC to meet its enrolment targets.

Corollary: Applicants must know the terms of an offer from UBC in time to compare it to offers from other institutions and to make reasonable financial and relocation plans for the eventual transition to UBC.

Corollary: To attract excellent applicants, UBC needs to make most offers before May 1st, which probably means that final grades cannot be considered from most educational jurisdictions and systems.

Corollary: Some applicants may be able to present evidence of readiness for success earlier than others so some offers of admission may be made much earlier than others using different sets of data.



COMPREHENSIVENESS:

- The terms of an offer of admission will include space in an academic program, and space in student housing and financial support when applicable.

Corollary: The application processes and decision timelines for both entry into academic programs and space in student housing must be linked because the allocation of student housing spaces must be part of a larger strategy for effective student recruitment.

Corollary: Offers of admission to an academic program and of merit-based financial assistance should be made at the same time based on similar sets of data because the allocation of scholarships must be part of a larger strategy for effective student recruitment.

COMMITMENT:

- An offer of admission will not be revoked unless the applicant does not meet a minimum set of conditions that are conveyed with the offer.

Corollary: An applicant offered admission will in turn be expected to make a firm commitment to the university.

Corollary: The minimum conditions for retention of an offer of admission should be reviewed and modified regularly to ensure that as many students as possible succeed academically.

Corollary: All direct-entry programs should adhere to a common minimum set of conditions for retention of offers of admission.

CONCLUSION

The analysis above serves to demonstrate the need to review admission policies as the environment in which the university exists continues to change. Universities are one of the few institutions that have survived since the Middle Ages but, although their role in modern society owes much to the past, they are not the same institutions nor are the social determinants of their viability the same and they must adapt. It is relatively easy to make changes for the sake of competitive advantage, for example, but it is also easy to make changes that may have only a short-term benefit. Policies to be developed must be founded on a set of guiding principles and where two or more principles are in conflict, the resolution should always aim to achieve the overall goals of the University. A set of principles is presented in this report in the hope that it will set in motion a thorough review of policies and practices in the Undergraduate Admissions Office at UBC Vancouver overseen by the Senate Admissions Committee. Unless changes are made, UBC is unlikely to continue to be an institution that “...*attracts and retains the best undergraduate...students from across BC, Canada and the world*” (Trek 2010).

Further review should involve wider consultation with students, faculty, and staff at UBC V, with constituent groups such as school teachers, counsellors and college representatives, and also with colleagues at UBC O, the latter to determine where common policies are appropriate. The review must encompass policy and practice in the areas of student housing and financial assistance and awards as well because of the critical roles played by those resources in attracting and retaining excellent students. The Admissions Committee is prepared to work with Enrolment Services to ensure that the review is guided by the principles presented here and meets the academic needs of the institution.