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Saturday Jul 26

ON COLLEGE: UC policy excludes worthy students lacking resources

By Jason Katz / Daily News columnist

Q: I was very interested to read about the possibility that the University of California may change its minimum eligibility requirements in your column last week. Why is UC considering this change?

A: In order to answer your question, I once again interviewed Dr. Mark Rashid, chair of the University of California Academic Senate's admissions policy committee.

Jason Katz: Why is UC considering changing its minimum eligibility requirements?

Mark Rashid: Currently, eligibility hinges on three things - completing the a-g curriculum, taking the required tests (SAT Reasoning or ACT with Writing, along with two SAT Subject tests in different subjects) and meeting the GPA/test-score index. If you do these three things, you are "guaranteed" admission (via referral), and you may (or may not) be selected for admission to one or more selective campuses to which you apply. If you fail to do these three things, then you are not even guaranteed consideration.

The reality of the policy in practice is that eligibility hinges almost entirely on the first two things - successfully completing a-g, and merely taking all the tests. Almost all students who do these things also clear the GPA/test-score index.

So, UC currently deems students to be in the "top 12.5 percent" of graduating seniors merely on the basis of their ability to successfully navigate the many complex rules and restrictions attending the coursework and testing requirements.

The policy has the effect of excluding some very high-achieving students who are ineligible for trifling or technical reasons, while awarding some students who have achieved at a much lower level with guaranteed admission.

Not surprisingly, this structural unfairness differentially burdens those with low college-going capital - low-income students, students whose parents did not go to college, students who do not have the benefit of well-resourced schools and adequate college counseling.

To put it simply: The eligibility policy is intended to identify and invite to UC the best and most deserving students in California, while excluding those whose records suggest that they are better suited to other postsecondary options. The current policy fulfills neither of these functions well.

JK: What would you say to opponents of the proposal who say that if the new eligibility requirements were adopted, UC's admissions offices would be inundated with thousands more applications?

MR: I would point out simply that UC admissions processing is a self-supporting activity. Applicants pay \$60 for each campus to which they apply, and the cost of application processing is considerably less than that.

Also, it might be observed that, between 1995 and 2006, freshman application volume to

For fall 2008 admission, application volume increased by about 10 percent over fall 2007. Finally, all the indicators point to a leveling-off or even a decline in high school graduates in the future. We may, in the end, have reason to be grateful for a modest increase in application volume.

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