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UC Regents Adopt Changes to Freshman Eligibility

The UC Board of Regents in February 2009 adopted a new policy to change freshman admission requirements to give more high-achieving students the chance to apply to UC and receive a full review of their applications. The new rules will take effect for the fall 2012 entering class.

The Academic Senate proposed the changes to address concerns that the current policy prevented UC from considering thousands of outstanding students with high GPAs and test scores just because of a technical flaw in their record or a missing test – chiefly, the SAT Subject Tests, which are not required by any other public university in the country.

Policy highlights

Under the new policy, all California high school seniors who ...

- complete 15 UC-required college-preparatory (“a-g”) courses (as they must now), with an additional requirement that 11 of those courses be completed by the end of the 11th grade,
- maintain a GPA of 3.0 or better (weighted by honors/AP bonus points) in these courses, and
- take the ACT with Writing or SAT Reasoning Test

... will be invited to apply and **will be entitled to a full and comprehensive review** of their applications at each UC campus to which they apply.

Within this “entitled to review” pool, two categories of applicants **will be guaranteed admission somewhere within the UC system:**

- those who fall in the top 9% of all high school graduates statewide, based on their ACT/SAT test scores and GPA in UC-approved courses; and
- those who rank in the top 9% of their own high school graduating class, based on their GPA in UC-approved courses.

Together, these students will make up about 10% of the state’s high school graduates. If not admitted to any campus to which they applied, these students will be referred, as eligible students are currently, to a campus with remaining space and offered admission there (currently UC Riverside or UC Merced). The remaining admissions needed to make up the full 12.5% pool of top students will be drawn from the broader “entitled to review” pool.

All qualified students, whether receiving the referral guarantee or not, will have their applications reviewed comprehensively by all UC campuses to which they apply and will compete for those seats. Their qualifications will be assessed using the same campus-based review processes already in place – ones that emphasize academic achievement, but that also account for a wide range of personal accomplishments and educational contexts.

Completion of at least the full 15 year-long college-preparatory courses currently required by UC will be expected of all students by the end of their senior year.

When will the new rules take effect?

They will take effect for the fall 2012 entering class, meaning the class applying in November 2011 for admission the following year. These students are now high school freshmen.

How does the new policy differ from eligibility requirements today?

There are two major differences.

First, *today there is no “entitled to review” category*. Students either meet the requirements that define UC eligibility and thereby are guaranteed a seat somewhere in the UC system, or they are deemed ineligible and only considered for admission under a few exceptional circumstances. Students currently become eligible if they (a) complete the 15 UC-required college-prep courses, (b) take the ACT with Writing or SAT Reasoning Test, *and* two SAT Subject Tests, and (c) either meet a GPA/test score index that places them in the top 12.5% of graduating seniors statewide, or rank in the top 4% of their school’s graduating class.

In effect, the current eligibility requirements define who is invited to apply while simultaneously guaranteeing them admission to UC based on grades and test scores alone. The new policy will invite more students to apply, but will guarantee admission to only the highest-performing subset of them, based on traditional measures of academic achievement.

Second, *SAT Subject Tests will no longer be required*, eliminating a barrier that has made otherwise high-performing students invisible to UC. However, the tests will still be considered as part of the application for any student who takes them and chooses to submit such scores, just as Advanced Placement tests are considered (but not required) now. SAT Subject Tests also can be recommended for applicants to particular majors.

Why make these changes?

The intent is to give more high-achieving high school students the opportunity to present their qualifications to UC campuses and, at the same time, to maintain high standards for admission through comprehensive campus selection processes. The policy:

- Sends a clear message that *all* students who have completed a reasonable course of preparation for college and have done well deserve a full review of their applications – not just those students deemed eligible by a limited set of numeric indicators.
- Addresses the fact that some outstanding students with high GPAs and ACT/SAT scores are currently excluded from consideration by UC because of a minor gap in their coursework or a missing test – chiefly, the SAT Subject Tests, which are not required by any other public university in the country.
- Continues to ensure that the highest-achieving students based on traditional academic indicators receive the benefit of guaranteed admission to at least one UC campus, though not necessarily their campus of choice.