

Contact: Diana Gonzalez

### ADMISSIONS STUDY TEAM STATUS REPORT

**Action Requested:** Receive the status report from the Admissions Study team.

**Executive Summary:** In light of its mission and stewardship role to provide educational opportunities to the citizens of the state, the Board of Regents has an ongoing interest in ensuring that students who are admitted to the Regent universities are appropriately prepared to engage successfully in a college education. Therefore, the Board fully welcomed the opportunity to conduct a study of the admissions requirements in response to House File 2395 and in Summer 2006 created an Admissions Study Team<sup>1</sup> to conduct the study<sup>2</sup>.

The team met nine times between June 2006 and October 2006. During that time, the team was informed by interviews, research, and relevant data analyses with a focus on developing admissions requirements through which the Regent universities would continue to admit students who have a reasonable probability of academic success. In light of its findings, the team recommends that the current admissions process of admitting students who are in the top 50% of their high school graduating class and who have the core subject area course requirements be replaced with a Regent Enterprise Admission Index using the following equation:

Admission Index = (2 x ACT composite score) + (1 x high school rank) + (20 x high school grade point average) + (5 x number of core subject area courses completed in high school).

Note: For purposes of calculating the Admission Index, ACT composite score has a top value of 36 (SAT scores will be converted to ACT composite equivalents); high school rank is expressed as a percentile with 99% as the top value; high school GPA is expressed in a 4-point scale; and number of core courses is expressed in terms of years or fractions of years of study. The chosen multipliers were statistically derived.

These factors (ACT composite score, high school rank, high school GPA, and number of core courses) have been found to predict academic success at the Regent universities and are consistent with the Iowa Department of Education's goal of encouraging students to take a rigorous core curriculum throughout their high school careers. Students would still be required to complete the core subject area course requirements specified by each Regent university.

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<sup>1</sup> The team included Michael Barron and Tom Rocklin (SUI); Kathy Jones and Karen Zunkel (ISU); Phil Patton and Dave Smith (UNI); and Diana Gonzalez (Board Office). Phil Caffrey (ISU) and Dennis Hendrickson (UNI) were active participants in the study.

<sup>2</sup> "The state board of regents should conduct a study relating to the admission requirements common to the three state universities, including administrative rule 681 IAC 1.1(1) which provides that graduates of approved Iowa high schools who have the subject matter backgrounds as recommended by each university and who rank in the upper one-half of their graduating class will be admitted. The state board shall submit a report to the senate and house of representatives standing committees on education by January 8, 2007, regarding the findings and recommendations of the study."

**Background:**

- ☞ History of admissions requirements. In 1958, the Board of Regents amended the Iowa Administrative Code to define the requirement for admission to the Regent universities as ranking in the upper half of a student's Iowa high school graduating class. In 1988, the Board again amended the Code by expanding the definition to include a requirement of completing the subject matter background recommended by each university. Since then, these two factors have guided the admissions process at the Regent universities, although the Regent universities may also admit students based on the professional judgment of the admissions officers after reviewing a variety of factors, such as ACT/SAT scores, advanced placement courses, family circumstances, and special abilities or talents.
  
- ☞ Use of multiple factors. Research has shown that high school class rank is the single best predictor of the student's potential for success in college. However, the use of a single predictor does not provide a complete picture of a student's achievements and potential. Completion of the "high school subject core" has also proven to be a valid predictor of college success. Therefore, in the interest of using other relevant predictive factors when making admissions decisions, in 1988, the Regent universities introduced the *completion of subject matter requirements* as an additional factor in the admissions process – "completion of certain courses in high school prepares students for success in college better than completion of less rigorous courses<sup>3</sup>."
  
- ☞ Input from secondary educators and experts. The team actively solicited input from secondary educators and experts regarding the use of multiple factors as predictors of college success and how these factors might influence the behavior of high school students.
  - ☑ The team interviewed two high school principals – one from a school that provides high school rank and another from a school that does not.
  - ☑ The team met with ACT staff to discuss statistical data of high school students who enrolled at a Regent university.
  - ☑ The team met with staff from the Iowa Testing Programs to discuss how well the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS) and the Iowa Tests of Educational Development (ITED) predict success in college relative to scores earned on the ACT exams.
  - ☑ Team members met with their respective advisory committees of high school guidance counselors, key Department of Education personnel, members of the Iowa High School Steering Committee, and high school principals to discuss possible changes to the current admissions requirements involving high school rank, core courses, standardized tests, and core course rigor.
  
- ☞ Guiding principles. In its analyses and discussions, the team used the following guiding principles:
  - ☑ The Regent universities would continue to admit students who have a reasonable probability of academic success.
  - ☑ The admissions policy would be consistent with the missions of the Board of Regents and the universities.

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<sup>3</sup> Source – ACT.

- ☑ Admissions requirements would be understandable and easy to use by families and educators to determine likelihood of admission.
- ☑ Changes in admissions requirements would result from relevant data analyses and would value students' academic high school experience.

☞ Admissions practices at other state public institutions. While there are significant differences in admissions practices at other state public institutions, the team's research found the following models:

- ☑ One model uses high school rank in combination with some form of standardized test. This model typically uses specific cutoffs to determine college admission.
- ☑ Another model uses an index score which is computed by assigning weights to multiple factors. Common variables used in this model include high school rank, standardized test scores, high school grade point average, high school courses, and core course grade point average. The index score might be the same for admission to all state universities or might be different by type of university.
- ☑ A third model is a holistic approach to admissions. Many factors may be considered but individual factors typically do not have set minimum cutoff levels for admission. The university's predictive factors for success are applied to the characteristics of individual students to make admissions decisions. Using this model, it is not possible to identify a common standard for admissions because each decision is individually based. For applicant advising purposes, a university will publish a profile of past entering classes and applicants can match their individual characteristics against those of an entering class to determine likelihood of admission.

☞ Alignment with Iowa high schools. The Regent university admissions model recommended on the next page is consistent with the Department of Education's recently-developed model core curriculum and the National Center for Education Statistics course identification system used by Iowa high schools.

### **Findings:**

The team's findings were informed by two sources – information gathered from secondary educators at the building, district, and state levels; and results of relevant data analyses.

☞ Secondary educator input

- ☑ Board of Regents admissions standards have a significant influence on the educational decisions of Iowa high school students.
- ☑ School administrators' goals include a rigorous and relevant curriculum for every Iowa student, including an educationally meaningful senior-year experience. Secondary and community college administrators welcome Regent university admissions standards that support that goal.
- ☑ School administrators support an admissions process that uses multiple factors.

- ☑ School administrators noted the usefulness of ACT scores as predictors of college success, consistent with data provided to the team by ACT and with the team's analysis of data from the universities.
- ☑ The state's Model Core Curriculum<sup>4</sup> guides the current planning and development in Iowa high schools.
- ☑ School administrators generally support having a common admissions policy for the three Regent universities, primarily for the sake of simplicity and ease of application.
- ☑ Emphasis should be placed on having students complete a rigorous set of high school courses.

☞ Data analyses<sup>5</sup>

- ☑ High school rank, high school grade point average, ACT composite score, and number of core courses taken by Iowa high school students each contributes significantly to the accuracy of predicting success in college, as measured by college grade point average and the rate at which students return to college from one year to the next.
- ☑ Using four factors of student learning allows for more accurate prediction of student success than using high school rank alone.
- ☑ ACT's analyses of data from the Regent universities demonstrate that the more courses that a student completes from a required set of core courses (comparable to the state's model core curriculum), the more likely it is that the student will succeed in college.

**Recommendations:**

The goal of the admissions process is to enroll students at the three Regent universities who have a reasonable probability of academic success. The team's data analyses showed the importance of using multiple factors in the admissions process. Therefore, the Admissions Study team proposes the following recommendations:

- ☞ Replace the current admissions process of admitting students who are in the top 50% of their high school graduating class and who have the core subject area course requirements with a new admissions process which combines four factors:
  - ☑ High school rank;
  - ☑ High school grade point average (GPA);
  - ☑ Performance on standardized tests (ACT composite or SAT combined); and
  - ☑ Number of core subject area courses completed in high school.

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<sup>4</sup> Senate File 245 required identification of a model core curriculum (1) to ensure that all Iowa students have access to a rigorous and relevant curriculum to prepare them for success in post-secondary education, the workforce, and the emerging global economy, and (2) to provide a tool for Iowa educators to use to assure that essential subject matter is being taught and essential knowledge and skills are being learned.

<sup>5</sup> The team would like to acknowledge and thank the following individuals who performed significant data analyses for the team – Michael Paulson (SUI Professor of Education); Carol Evans (SUI Program Associate II); Darin Wohlgemuth (ISU Director of Research, Enrollment Services); Mack Shelley (ISU Professor of Statistics); Robyn Johnson (ISU Program Coordinator, Research Institute for Studies in Education); Shiva Sikdar (ISU Graduate Assistant, Economics Dept.), and Jim Maxey (ACT Senior Research Scientist).

These factors predict academic success at the Regent universities and are consistent with the Iowa Department of Education's goal of encouraging students to take a rigorous core curriculum throughout their high school careers. Students would still be required to complete the core subject area course requirements specified by each Regent university.

- ✎ Implement a Regent Enterprise Admission Index with the four factors identified above, using the following equation:

Admission Index = (2 x ACT composite score) + high school rank + (20 x high school GPA) + (5 x number of core subject area courses completed in high school).

Note: For purposes of calculating the Admission Index, high school rank is expressed as a percentile with 99% as the top value, GPA is expressed in a 4-point scale, ACT composite scores have a top value of 36 (SAT scores will be converted to ACT composite equivalents), and number of core courses is expressed in terms of years or fractions of years of study. The chosen multipliers were statistically derived.

- ✎ Use the National Center for Education Statistics course numbering system implemented by the Iowa school districts to define the core subject area courses that will be counted in the Regent Enterprise Admission Index
- ✎ Use the same Admission Index Score for guaranteed admission to the three Regent universities. The team considered potential benefits of using different scores for guaranteed admission, including matching admissions requirements to a university's distinctive mission. However, the team ultimately decided that the benefits of having the same score for guaranteed admission to the three universities outweighed the benefits of different scores.
- ✎ Implement the proposed admissions process for Fall 2009 enrollment at the Regent universities. This would allow current high school sophomores two years to prepare for the changes.
- ✎ Allow each Regent university to continue to conduct individual reviews of students who might not meet the guaranteed admission standards but who have otherwise demonstrated potential and commitment to succeeding at a Regent university. This individual review process would also be used in cases where a student does not have all required factors, e.g., no high school rank.
- ✎ Re-affirm the current Board policy that non-resident applicants will be held to standards at least as high as those for resident applicants.
- ✎ Update the Board of Regents Policy Manual to include the equation for the Regent Enterprise Admission Index and Admission Index Score required for guaranteed admission to the Regent universities.
- ✎ Publish the Regent Enterprise Admission Index and the Admission Index Score required for guaranteed admission to the Regent universities in the Board of Regents and universities' websites. Also include an online Admission Index calculator on the websites.
- ✎ Update the *Building Your Future* brochure<sup>6</sup> describing the new admissions process.

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<sup>6</sup> This brochure was prepared jointly by the three Regent universities to define the minimum requirements for admission and the optimum recommendations for success. Copies are made available to all 8<sup>th</sup> grade students in the state annually. The brochure is also available on the Board of Regents, universities', and Department of Education's websites.

- ☞ Provide adequate notice to students and the general public about future changes to the Regent Enterprise Admission Index.
- ☞ Continue to require the core subject area courses, including English, mathematics, science, social science, and foreign language/electives, as defined by each Regent university.
- ☞ Amend the Iowa Administrative Code to include the four factors in the admissions process.
- ☞ Conduct periodic reviews of the new admissions process. The first review should be conducted no later than five years after implementation of the new process.

The team will finalize the report to the legislature for the December 2006 Board of Regents meeting at which time the Board will be asked to consider approving the proposed Regent Enterprise admissions standards.