Comprehensive Review: Questions and Answers

At their October 17th meeting, members of the Board of Regents posed a variety of questions regarding the Academic Senate’s proposal for comprehensive review in UC admissions. This document contains a brief overview of the proposal, followed by responses to the questions asked by The Regents. The responses have been developed through consultations with the Academic Senate, the administration, and campus representatives.

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Overview

The admissions policies and practices of the University of California trace their origins to a number of sources. The Regents set the broad policy framework for admissions; the Academic Senate is delegated responsibility for developing admissions principles and guidelines within the framework established by The Regents; professional staff are guided by the faculty in implementing admissions policies on a day-to-day basis; and everyone involved in the decision-making structure is vested with accountability for the results of the process.

Regents’ policy RE-28 states, in part, that “the University shall seek out and enroll, on each of its campuses, a student body that demonstrates high academic achievement or exceptional talent, and that encompasses the broad diversity of backgrounds characteristic of California.” The Academic Senate is mandated to implement that policy in a fair and reasonable manner. Comprehensive review is the Senate’s proposal for doing so.

At the October 17th meeting, several Regents asked some critical questions: What is it that we are seeking to accomplish? What is the desired outcome of comprehensive review? The short answer is that the Senate and administration believe that comprehensive review will strengthen the academic preparation and performance of students throughout California who seek a UC education. The proposed policy sends a strong message to K-12 schools and students that the University is looking for students who have achieved at high levels and have challenged themselves to the greatest extent possible. The policy calls upon the University to examine applicants’ records of performance more thoroughly than ever before, looking beyond simple quantitative indicators to gain a more complete understanding of the extent to which students have exhibited the qualities—among them, tenacity, discipline, curiosity—that indicate the likelihood of high future achievement. The proposal seeks to improve the University’s ability to
admit students who not only score well on traditional measures of performance but are prepared to thrive in the University’s challenging academic environment.

The Senate and administration are convinced that the University is well prepared to implement the policy of comprehensive review with integrity, professionalism, and strict attention to the need for accountability. Faculty will continue to be involved in the development and implementation of campus admissions practices, and the professional admissions staffs on the campuses will continue to administer the admissions process in ways that meet the goals of The Regents’ policies. Selection procedures will continue to be based on objective information about students’ records that will be analyzed more thoroughly than heretofore; the implementation guidelines drafted by the Senate also make clear that academic achievement will remain the principal factor in selection. Reports on the outcomes of comprehensive review will be provided to The Regents periodically.

Comprehensive review, in the view of the Senate and administration, will encourage the admission of students who are best prepared to meet and benefit from the rigors of a UC education. These qualities will be reflected in many ways—curricular preparation, grades, test scores, activities outside of class, and personal qualities as evidenced in students’ honors, achievements, and personal statements. A student body selected with these factors in mind should achieve higher grades at UC, higher persistence rates, and greater accomplishments upon graduation. Finally, this approach will send a clear message that students at any comprehensive high school in California have a real opportunity to be admitted to the UC campus of their choice if they challenge themselves and excel. In these ways, the proposal reflects the goals stated in Regental policy.

After extensive review by campus divisions of the Academic Senate, on October 31 the Assembly of the Academic Senate unanimously approved the comprehensive review proposal.

Faculty involvement in admissions

How have faculty, at both the systemwide and campus levels, been involved in the framing of the Senate’s recommendation that UC move to comprehensive review in admissions?

Under the Standing Orders of The Regents, the Academic Senate has been delegated responsibility to set the conditions for admission, subject to the approval of the Board of Regents. The Academic Senate has charged one of its standing Universitywide committees, the Board of Admissions and Relations with Schools (BOARS), with the responsibility to develop and recommend changes in undergraduate admissions policy.

Recommendations for policy changes are forwarded by BOARS to the Academic Council, the executive arm of the Academic Senate. The Academic Council consults with other Universitywide Senate committees, such as the University Committee on Educational Policy, and also with each campus division of the Senate. The divisions in turn seek advice from local campus committees, such as the Admissions and Enrollment Committee and the local Educational Policy Committee. A response to the proposal is formulated at the campus level and forwarded from each Senate division to the Academic Council. If consensus is reached at Council, the proposal is then sent for final review and approval to the Assembly of the Academic Senate, the systemwide legislative body representing the Senate. Once the Assembly approves the proposal, the recommendations are forwarded to the President for presentation to the Board of Regents. The President presents recommendations either for information or for action.
This consultative process was followed in developing the proposal on comprehensive review. BOARS initiated discussions earlier this year and formulated a set of principles on comprehensive review in June. The principles were endorsed at the July meeting of the Academic Council. Following that meeting, the chair of the Academic Senate asked the divisional chairs at each campus to review BOARS’ principles and recommendations on comprehensive review. In addition, in July the Senate chair forwarded to the divisions some refinements of the original proposal developed by BOARS and asked the divisions to comment by September 1. The campus commentaries and plans on comprehensive review were reviewed by BOARS in September. The final recommendations from BOARS were then forwarded to the Academic Council, which unanimously approved the proposal (with one abstention), with the provision that a comprehensive evaluation of the changes be completed within a five-year period after the date of implementation. Finally, the Assembly of the Academic Senate voted unanimously (by a vote of 42-0, with three abstentions) to approve the proposal on October 31.

Examples of campus consultation and review processes are highlighted below. In addition, the chair of BOARS visited every campus—some more than once—to consult and discuss issues relating to the proposal with faculty, senior administration officials, and admissions staff. Finally, BOARS asked the directors of admissions at each campus to join BOARS at its meeting in early October to make a formal presentation on their plans for implementing comprehensive review and to give both BOARS members and the directors an opportunity to share comments, best practices, and advice on how to best implement the proposal. At that meeting, the admissions directors indicated that their campuses are prepared to implement comprehensive admissions.

In response to questions posed at the October Regents’ meeting, campus academic senates were asked to describe the review and approval processes at their campuses. Below are excerpts from three representative campuses.

- **At UC Irvine**, a task force consisting of faculty active in the Senate, advised by some members of the administration, met several times over the summer. Its findings were reviewed by the Council on Educational Policy, which oversees undergraduate education; by the Committee on Undergraduate Admissions and Relations with Schools and Colleges; and by the Senate Cabinet. Their findings were also discussed at a meeting of the Enrollment Council, a joint faculty-administration committee. Finally, comprehensive review was discussed at the annual retreat for the Senate leadership in September and at a meeting of the Divisional Assembly. The Divisional Senate at UC Irvine estimates that more than 100 faculty members were involved in the review, about as many Senate members as are involved in any review process at UCI.

- **At UCLA**, the faculty committee responsible for setting and implementing admissions and enrollment policy (CUARS) met frequently over the summer. Starting in September, other appropriate committees of the UCLA Senate also considered the proposal. On October 4, the chair of the UCLA Division convened the chairs of the faculty executive committees of the various Schools and the College of Letters and Science to gather additional comments on comprehensive admissions. Representatives attended from all units engaged in undergraduate education, including the College of Letters and Science, and the Schools of Engineering, Arts and Architecture, and Theater, Film and Television.

- **At UC Santa Barbara**, the admissions and enrollment committee met frequently in the spring and over the summer to discuss the BOARS proposal. Prior to the Academic Council’s vote on the proposal, the UCSB admissions and enrollment committee held discussions with the Divisional Advisory Committee to the Chair and the Executive Committee of the Santa Barbara Division of the academic senate.
This body recommended approval of BOARS’ proposal with the stipulation for a review of the new comprehensive admissions process after several years of experience. At its October 25th meeting, the UCSB Faculty Legislature endorsed the BOARS recommendations.

What are the nature and extent of faculty involvement in admissions matters at the campus level?

At the campus level, faculty play a critical role in admissions matters through their involvement in policy development, staff training, consideration of borderline applications, and process evaluation.

First, through the systemwide Academic Senate, faculty from UC campuses develop and recommend admissions policies to The Regents reflecting the University’s values and goals. At the campus level, faculty apply those systemwide tenets to craft campus-specific admissions policies and practices. Second, faculty members review and approve training processes throughout the admissions cycle that ensure application readers are implementing the admissions policies correctly; these are described in detail below in the “staff involvement” section. Third, while faculty responsibilities in the areas of teaching, research, and public service generally do not allow them to spend large amounts of time reading and rating applications, they may be called in as “tie-breakers” to help reach admissions decisions. Finally, faculty closely monitor the outcomes of the decision-making process and consult with admissions staff on refinements to the process each year.

Faculty are appointed to Universitywide committees by the Committee on Committees, which is comprised of faculty members who are chairs or vice chairs of the corresponding campus senate committee. At the campus level, the committee on committees is elected by faculty representing various departments and schools. At the beginning of each academic year, both the chair of the campus academic senate and the committee on committees send letters to all faculty encouraging participation in the senate. Faculty members express interest in serving on particular committees and the committee on committees appoints members to each campus committee. If the response is insufficient to meet campus needs, the committee on committees solicits nominations.

Who ultimately makes admissions decisions in daily operations?

Campus admissions directors, with the oversight of the Academic Senate as described above, ultimately are responsible for most day-to-day admissions decisions.

How do the Academic Senate and BOARS propose to monitor outcomes and evaluate comprehensive admissions processes at campuses?

The Academic Senate takes seriously its responsibilities for implementing comprehensive review. BOARS is preparing a “Statement on Accountability” that will include the following principles and requirements:

- Campuses should ensure that the faculty and supporting staff who evaluate applicants are well qualified to select from among eligible applicants to the campus.
- Campus practices should be regularly evaluated and monitored both by the Divisional Senates and by BOARS during the admissions process.
- Annual admissions and enrollment reports should be submitted both to the campus senates and to BOARS. These reports would define campus goals for admission and evaluate the extent to which the goals are being met.
• BOARS should disseminate to the campuses systemwide information that permits sharing of best practices and refinement of campus procedures.

Additionally, the Senate has charged BOARS with conducting an ongoing evaluation of comprehensive review. The Regents would receive annual reports from the Senate on the implementation and impact of the proposed new policy, with a comprehensive report at the end of the initial five-year implementation period. That report would describe, at a minimum:

• The effects of comprehensive review on academic quality, as indicated by traditional measures such as high school grades, test scores, first-year UC grades, and persistence and graduation rates;
• The effects of comprehensive review on student preparation and motivation, as evidenced by such measures as the number and rigor of college preparatory courses taken by students admitted to UC and their academic performance in those courses;
• Data regarding applications, admissions, and enrollments of students by ethnicity, both campus and systemwide; and
• The costs and benefits of comprehensive review.

**Staff involvement in admissions**

**What are the nature and extent of staff involvement in the evaluation of individual applicants?**

**How are staff recruited and selected? What are their qualifications to make admissions decisions? What are the nature and extent of their training?**

Each admissions office is headed by a team of admissions professionals with appropriate levels of education and experience in college admissions. The majority of the reviewers are professional admissions staff with long-term experience. During the evaluation cycle, most campuses supplement their own staff with carefully chosen admissions readers. Typically, these include staff borrowed from other relevant campus units—academic advisors and academic support professionals—as well as non-campus staff such as retired or former professional admissions staff; and high school counselors, administrators, or teachers across the State with knowledge about the kind of preparation applicants receive for a UC education while in the K-12 system. In some cases, the readers are UC faculty members.

All reviewers go through formal training processes, the duration and content of which vary depending on the nature of the reading process at each campus. An example of the training a fairly typical campus might require is provided by UC Santa Barbara. Each year, training at UCSB is required of all new application reviewers, and re-training is required for experienced reviewers. Reviewers receive a minimum of 10 hours of group training each year prior to reading. New reviewers typically receive another four hours of training. New reviewers receive additional individualized training as needed, and all reviewers receive regular feedback from senior admissions staff, including the admissions director, who is charged with the responsibility for managing the process.

Training consists of a detailed discussion of the admissions process and the role of the reviewers in that process, followed by a review of the reader manual. The manual contains background information and goals set forth by the Senate Admissions and Enrollment Committee as well as information specific to the reading process. After this preparatory information is reviewed in detail and understood by reviewers, sample admission applications are read and scored by the trainees. At least 20 samples are reviewed. Scores are tabulated and discussed to refine reviewers’ understanding of how to apply the selection criteria validly and consistently. Practice scoring continues until reviewers are consistently scoring within one
point of each other on a scale of 1 to 9 (9 being the highest). Occasionally a volunteer does not successfully complete the training and is released from the reading commitment.

In addition to meeting regularly with campus faculty during the evaluation cycle, admissions directors also meet annually with BOARS. Individual BOARS members interact regularly with campus admissions staff. The Senate believes that admissions professionals have the qualifications and integrity to enact Senate policies.

How does the University ensure consistency in scoring across readers? How reliable are their decisions? In other words, how does the University ensure that readers are applying the same standards to all applicants?

UC Berkeley, a campus that has taken significant steps toward comprehensive review, provides a useful illustration. Each application to Berkeley is read by at least two independent reviewers to ensure consistency and reliability. Any file that receives scores more than one point apart is re-read by a senior admissions supervisor. Readers are carefully trained and instructed to set aside any file to which they have a personal interest or an emotional reaction. Outcomes are tracked on a weekly basis by admissions managers to identify any trends in the ways that individual readers evaluate files, such as consistently high or low scores or consistently differing scores that require applications to be forwarded to a third reader. Similar measures are used by agencies that evaluate the SAT II Writing tests, State Bar exams, and other qualitative assessment tools. Similar evaluation principles are used by the other UC campuses.

UC Berkeley has found that less than 4 percent of applications that have been reviewed by two readers must be sent to a third reader for a decision due to differences in the ratings given by the first two readers. Fully 97 percent of applications to Berkeley receive ratings from each of the two readers, on a 1-to-5 basis, that are within one point of each other. Other campuses report similar findings; UC Irvine and UCLA, for instance, report that no more than 5 percent of applications require a third read.

Academic quality/selection of students

How would a move to comprehensive review affect the academic quality of the entering class?

The academic quality of the class admitted to the UC system as a whole would not be affected. The reason is that the University would still guarantee admission to one of its campuses for all eligible students. Students would still become UC-eligible by completing the required academic coursework and meeting the grade and test score requirements in UC’s statewide eligibility index, or as defined by the Eligibility in the Local Context program.

The Senate and administration believe that the academic quality of the class admitted to a particular campus would be strengthened by comprehensive review. The practice of reviewing the full range of accomplishments presented by an applicant—as opposed to a narrow range of those accomplishments—would produce a more thorough, more critical admissions process that would produce better decisions. Campuses’ ability to admit students who not only score well on traditional measures but are prepared to thrive in the University’s demanding academic environment will be improved. Academic quality, defined in this way, will be enhanced.

The Senate has adopted, as part of the revised proposed Guidelines for Implementation of University Policy on Undergraduate Admissions, a set of guiding principles for comprehensive review that begins with the following:
• “The admissions process honors academic achievement and accords priority to students of high academic accomplishment.”

Other guiding principles include:

• “Campus policies should reflect continued commitment to the goal of enrolling classes that exhibit academic excellence as well as diversity of talents and abilities, personal experience, and backgrounds.”
• “The admission process should select students of whom the campus will be proud, and who give evidence that they will use their education to make contributions to the intellectual, cultural, social, and political life of California, the United States, and the broader international community.”
• “The admissions process should select those students who demonstrate a strong likelihood that they will persist to graduation.”

The full set of guiding principles is contained in the Guidelines and will be included in the Regents’ agenda packet.

It is important to emphasize that, under the proposed system of comprehensive review, some campuses may conclude that some applicants are so highly qualified, when viewed initially in terms of their achievement on a range of academic criteria, that they would be admitted under any circumstance—in which case further review of their applications is not warranted. Faculty on each campus would be able to establish specific levels of academic achievement that, if reached, would be sufficient to ensure admission. However, these would be defined by faculty-specified levels of accomplishment on multiple academic criteria, rather than as percentages of the admitted class, as is the case with the current “tiered” system.

It is also important to stress that the weights applied to individual academic indicators remain the prerogative of the faculty on each campus. Under comprehensive review, as in the present tiered system, average academic indicators for the admitted class may change as a result of changes in faculty emphasis on particular indicators. An illustration of this effect is provided by the Berkeley experience. In the years since a form of comprehensive review was adopted at UC Berkeley—and since faculty placed greater emphasis on SAT II scores and performance in honors and AP courses in the evaluation process—several measures of academic accomplishment have risen. The GPA of Berkeley students after one year, the one-year persistence rate, the number of high school honors courses taken by admitted students, and the SAT II composite score of the entering class have all increased. More information is contained in a separate report on Berkeley’s process being prepared by the Berkeley campus, which will be sent under separate cover to The Regents.

Who benefits under the proposed process of comprehensive review in comparison to current practices?

The students who benefit will be those who have made the most of their opportunities in high school—for instance, those who have challenged themselves by taking and doing well in the toughest course pattern available at their school, or those who have distinguished themselves through extraordinary community, leadership, or extracurricular accomplishments in addition to compiling an outstanding academic record; or those who have created a record of academic accomplishment that, while perhaps not extraordinary on a statewide basis, is exceptional given their family, community, educational, or socioeconomic circumstances and thus demonstrates the drive and ability to succeed in a challenging academic environment.

All students who become UC-eligible on the University’s current measures of academic
achievement will still be guaranteed a place in the UC system, even if denied admission to their campus of choice. However, those students previously admitted to their first-choice campus that could conceivably be denied admission to that campus under comprehensive review will be those who have not challenged themselves relative to other applicants. The Senate and administration believe that most of these students would have been at the bottom of the current Tier I admit pool. These students might include, for instance, those who have taken a course load in which it would be easier to obtain a 4.0 GPA than in other course patterns available at their school; or those whose record indicates a preference for doing the minimum academically as opposed to challenging themselves, both inside and outside the classroom, in their capacities as thinkers, creators, artists, and citizens.

The Senate’s support for comprehensive review is based on their belief that success in an academic community of UC’s caliber—and success in the larger society for which the University seeks to prepare future leaders—is not obtained solely by attaining a certain minimum performance level on a quantitative scale, such as a grade or test score. It also requires serious, sustained personal initiative that can be demonstrated in a multitude of ways.

It is important to be clear that comprehensive review does not focus on whether a student has had a disadvantage to overcome—it does not reward disadvantage itself. Rather, it rewards those students who have taken on significant challenges and succeeded, whether those challenges were placed before them by circumstance or by personal initiative.

How many students who would have been admitted in Tier I under current admissions policies would be denied admission under comprehensive review?

Campuses estimate that a small number of students who have been admitted on the margin of Tier I, but who perhaps have not challenged themselves academically relative to other applicants, may not be admitted to a particular campus under comprehensive review. Any such eligible students would, however, still be guaranteed admission somewhere in the UC system.

Perhaps the best information we have is from UC Berkeley, which has just completed a simulation comparing results under the proposed “unitary” system with actual Fall 2001 results. (A full report on this simulation is being prepared and will be send under separate cover to The Regents.) Based on a sample of roughly 1,000 cases, Berkeley found that 84 percent of the students admitted to either the fall or spring under the current system would be admitted under the new system. Of those students actually admitted under Tier I in Fall 2001, 90 percent were admitted to the fall under the unitary process and another 6 percent were admitted to the spring. Less than 4 percent of the actual Tier I admits were denied in the simulated unitary process. An analysis of these files showed they were at the very bottom of the previous Tier I and, in general, had very thin records outside the classroom.

The simulation also showed that the overall academic strength of the admitted class, as measured by traditional academic criteria, increased under the proposed unitary system.

Finally, an analysis of all students for whom the decision changed—that is, those admitted under the new system but denied under the old, versus those admitted under the old process but denied under the new—revealed that the academic quality of students admitted under the proposed new system was higher while average family income was lower. That is, the new process identified students who were stronger academically and came from less privileged backgrounds.

Other UC campuses have conducted preliminary simulations that aim to address similar questions. The findings include:
• **UC Irvine** – An estimated 375 students admitted at UC Irvine for Fall 2001, out of 17,242 total freshmen admitted, might be displaced by other students admitted under comprehensive review. (This represents 2.2 percent of the total number of admitted students.) In general, the formerly admitted group would have had modest academic credentials (high school GPA close to 3.6 and individual SAT test scores of at least 500) but insufficient additional information (as might be shown in their personal statement, extracurricular activities, listing of honors courses completed, etc.) to warrant admission under comprehensive review. Students likely to gain entry under comprehensive review would exemplify strong academic and personal profiles, as seen in extensive coursework, honors or awards related to coursework, and a strong statement about how the individual intends to pursue his or her academic interests. Such students may not have been admitted in the past simply because their grade point average was not as strong as their test scores and a comprehensive read was not conducted.

• **UC Davis** – Simulation analyses show that approximately 98 percent of the students admitted in Tier I for Fall 2001 would also be admitted under selection by comprehensive review. Overall, 94 percent of the admitted class would remain the same. Students who would be excluded from the admitted class are those with minimal academic index scores (defined by high school GPA, test scores, and number and quality of “a-g” courses) who lack a well-rounded personal profile. These students would be less competitive than their counterparts who demonstrated such qualities as leadership; special talents; exceptional achievement despite challenges and hardships; significant volunteer or community service; honors and awards; or marked improvement in a consistently challenging academic program.

Why, if so few admissions results are likely to change, is the move to comprehensive review needed? As stated previously, the answer lies in the message delivered to K-12 schools and students, and the resulting effects on achievement and performance. Comprehensive review communicates clearly that the University is asking students to take full advantage of the opportunities available to them and to challenge themselves to the greatest extent possible. The Senate and administration believe this message will have a positive impact on the motivation, initiative, and achievement of students aspiring to UC.

**How would a strong, but not outstanding, student from a high-performing high school be treated under comprehensive review?**

The simplest answer is that no admissions decision could be made on the basis of so little information; additional information about the broader experiences, challenges, opportunities, and accomplishments of the student would be necessary. A student who demonstrated a high level of initiative or promise through his or her accomplishments in that high school would likely be looked upon favorably in the admissions process. A student who had a strong, but not outstanding record without additional distinguishing features would still quite likely be admitted at many of the UC campuses, but his or her competitiveness would vary by campus.

**Given that similar grades from different high schools are not necessarily alike, how is the “quality” of the school evaluated and the quality of the student’s GPA?**

The factors used to assess the relative quality of schools include the number and range of honors and Advanced Placement (AP) courses offered; grade distributions in those courses; average scores on the SAT I, SAT II, and AP exams; number of graduates from a particular school; completion rates of UC’s “a-g” courses; average class size; student-teacher ratio; number of teachers with emergency permits (as opposed to teaching credentials); percentage of
students on AFDC or free lunch programs; and academic performance indicators, as reported by the California Department of Education.

Campuses collect a range of data to help with this assessment. At UCLA, academic rankings for students from one school are all done at the same time, by the same reader, so that he or she has a sense of the full range of achievement students in that school can reach. At UC Berkeley, readers receive a cover sheet for each application that summarizes the applicant’s achievement and educational environment and includes 75 different data elements that assist in evaluating achievement in the school context. Through reviewing large numbers of applications from California students each year, admissions professionals on the UC campuses gain a very good sense of the relative quality of the State’s individual high schools.

How does the University verify information on the application, particularly personal claims to disadvantage, hardship, or community service?

Campuses that have moved in the direction of comprehensive review have found that doing so actually improves their ability to spot exaggerated claims, “canned” essays, and other misleading information. Reviewing the full file, and the full files of other students from the same school and community, puts the reader in the best position to identify inconsistent or questionable information. If a claim in an application does not ring true or if a reader has questions about it, the issue is referred to officials in the admissions office who may seek additional information from the student and/or call the high school directly for verification. Also, some claims on the application may be checked against other written materials; for instance, claims about household income can be and often are checked against financial aid materials.

How can the University make determinations about an applicant’s “promise” and future “potential to contribute to society” from a “cursory” review of an application that requires one essay?

The extensive training of the professional staff and oversight of the faculty, as described above, are critical to making admissions decisions. It is worthwhile to note, as well, that these decisions are relative decisions—they are not judgments of a student’s overall worth or fundamental character, but judgments about the student’s preparation for and likely success at a UC campus, relative to those of other students who also are applying.

A wide range of responses provided on the application offers useful information in this respect. Traditional measures of academic accomplishment such as grades and test scores, information about the applicant’s school, highlights of the student’s family background, details of the applicant’s accomplishments inside and outside the classroom, and the essay inform the admissions decision.

Each campus structures its admissions process in a way that requires less time to be spent on applications that are easy to identify as clear admits or denials, allowing more time to be spent on those it considers most challenging—and this would continue to be the case under comprehensive review. In some cases at UC Berkeley, for instance, the campus already requests and reviews additional documentation about an applicant, such as letters of recommendation. Under comprehensive review, “borderline” cases would continue to receive more scrutiny than other applications, meaning that the most challenging admissions decisions would involve far more than a cursory review.

How would comprehensive review differ from the current Tier II evaluation and selection process at each campus?

As in the current Tier II selection process, admissions under comprehensive review would
consider both academic and supplemental selection criteria. However, under comprehensive review, campuses would be encouraged to look more broadly and deeply at the academic factors, viewing a student’s educational experiences and accomplishments in their totality. Comprehensive review contemplates not just removal of the two-tiered selection system, but a new approach to admissions that evaluates all applicants more thoroughly overall.

How would comprehensive admissions affect the University’s ability to recruit and retain faculty?

The Senate and administration believe that, in many cases, it would help. UC would be moving to a system used by the nation’s most selective private and public universities. Certainly some faculty would argue that high school grades and SAT scores are the most important criteria for admitting students. But many—and this is reflected by the unanimous vote of the Academic Senate in support of comprehensive review—believe, based on their interactions with students in classrooms and labs, that the best-prepared and most intellectually engaged students are not simply those with the highest test scores and high school grades. Additionally, they acknowledge that a single set of numbers, without the context of the student’s overall experience, may well be misleading. An admissions process that recognizes these principles may, if anything, help attract new faculty members, though we have no formal analysis on this topic.

Accountability/explainability/public confidence

How would the University explain explicitly the admissions process to the public under comprehensive review? How can the University reassure the public that this is not a “luck of the draw” process?

This is a concern that the Senate and administration take seriously. As a public institution, our standards of “explainability” are necessarily higher than those for a private institution. However, comprehensive review arguably does not make the admissions process any more difficult to explain than it already is. Eligibility would remain the first step and would still be based on the same quantitative criteria. The basic guarantee that eligibility provides would remain unchanged. Campus selection would be the next step, and it would still be based on the same 14 selection criteria that are already used in various combinations in the Tier I/Tier II structure.

It could be argued, in fact, that the Tier I/Tier II structure reduces public confidence and explainability by suggesting that different groups of students should be judged on different standards—and no student knows which set he or she is being judged on. The Senate and administration believe that the current two-tier system may create the public perception of a kind of caste system in UC admissions. Tier I students admitted under its criteria are seen to be more highly valued than Tier II students admitted under its criteria. While it is true that no admitted student knows which tier he or she was selected under, the uncertainty about whether one is a Tier I or Tier II admit is likely to be divisive. A much better message to the public—including applicants, parents, teachers, and schools—is that the University values all achievements, academic and other, and the personal qualities of all applicants. Comprehensive review allows every student to be admitted on the same set of criteria and as a whole person. Under comprehensive review, students and their families would have the confidence of knowing that all the information required on the application will be taken into consideration, rather than an undefined subset. In addition, the University will make every effort to explain the admissions process and the principles that underlie it as simply and concisely as possible. The Senate’s guiding principles for comprehensive review, which will be available in The Regents’ agenda packets, provide clear language regarding the process students will be evaluated on and the
qualities UC seeks.

It can be explained, for instance, that priority in the admissions process will still be given to high academic accomplishment. It can be explained that the University will assess merit not only on the basis of grades and test scores, but on the basis of the full range of accomplishments presented in the application. And it can be explained that these accomplishments will be viewed in the context of the opportunities and challenges an applicant has faced, because the University is seeking students who have demonstrated both the academic skills and the personal initiative that are necessary for success at UC.

*How would the University send the message to students that if they continue to work hard and do well in school, they will still be admitted to a UC campus? How would a change to comprehensive review affect a prospective applicant’s ability to plan and set goals and motivation to strive for academic excellence?*

First, UC’s eligibility criteria will continue to send those signals very strongly. Grades in the college preparatory curriculum coupled with test scores—or, alternatively, ranking at the top of the class in one’s own high school based on grades in the “a-g” courses—will remain the critical first gatekeeper for students seeking entrance to the UC system.

Second, through its admissions materials, counselor conferences, interactions with prospective students, and other pre-admissions activities, the University will seek to communicate clearly the fact that academic qualifications remain at the heart of the admissions process, and that UC is seeking, first and foremost, good students. Additionally, the University will emphasize to students the importance of seeking opportunities to challenge themselves and to make the most of opportunities presented to them.

As UC Santa Barbara reports, “We believe the messages that we give students will be consistent with the messages that we have provided in the past: that academic preparation and performance are of central importance, and that additional information and activities that demonstrate academic motivation and leadership are also considered. These messages should not significantly alter a prospective applicant’s motivation to strive for excellence.”

Finally, there is no evidence that the comprehensive review employed by many of the nation’s most selective public and private universities has led students aspiring to attend those institutions to devote insufficient attention to doing well in school; the opposite is true.

*Won’t the public perceive comprehensive review as “less fair” since students from disadvantaged backgrounds will benefit?*

As noted above, comprehensive review does not reward disadvantage itself. It rewards students who have taken on and successfully met challenges in their lives—while achieving an impressive academic record—no matter what the combination of circumstance and personal initiative that has produced those challenges.

Additionally, public perceptions of UC admissions are not likely to be shaped by discussions of comprehensive review as an abstract process; the admissions outcomes themselves will surely have much more influence over how the process is viewed. School counselors report that UC Berkeley is making better admissions decisions since moving toward comprehensive review—one indicator of public perceptions of fairness. Counselors also report that applicants and their parents expect that all the information reported in an application is fully assessed, not just grades and test scores.

*Unlike the Eligibility in the Local Context and the Dual Admissions Programs, won’t*
comprehensive review increase the public's uncertainty about the UC admissions process and our expectations?

ELC and Dual Admissions are based on quantitatively defined eligibility standards, but a focus on quantitative measures is not the only way to gain public understanding and confidence in the admissions process. An equally effective way is to clearly define the qualitative features the University is seeking in its students, explain that the process is dependent on a review of all the factors a student brings to the table, answer questions about the process, and allow admissions outcomes to speak for themselves.

No campus faculty will implement a process of comprehensive review that, because of vagueness, threatens the campus' desirability to prospective students or jeopardizes its relationship with the California public as a whole.

UC Berkeley's process

The Regents posed several questions about the selection process used by UC Berkeley. These questions are being addressed in a separate report being prepared by the Berkeley campus that will be sent under separate cover to The Regents shortly.

Campus implementation plans

Will the implementation of comprehensive review be standardized across the campuses, or will individual campuses be allowed to customize?

Principles defined by BOARS and endorsed by the Academic Senate will provide a basic systemwide architecture for comprehensive review. However, campuses will be given significant flexibility to implement the details of comprehensive review in a manner that fits the character, academic strengths, and stage of development of the campus.

How did the campuses respond to BOARS when it requested input on the proposal for comprehensive review?

BOARS includes representatives from all campuses. Campus representatives and admissions committees were consulted during the initial development of the proposal, and the campuses participated in a broad academic review of the BOARS proposal during the summer. Slight modifications were made based on specific campus input and questions.

What are the campuses’ plans for implementation of comprehensive review?

The quality of academic preparation is the primary basis upon which all campus admissions decisions are made and will continue to be made under comprehensive review. Academic achievement is assessed by utilizing a variety of information contained in the application. Primary among these elements is a full description of the college preparatory coursework completed or in progress from 7th through 12th grade. Campuses also assess other information pertaining to the student's experience and achievements outside of the classroom. This information is utilized to augment the academic assessment and to assess traits such as motivation, tenacity, and intellectual curiosity that are valuable to the educational environment of the campus.
It is for this reason that all selective UC admissions programs have designed comprehensive review models for balancing academic achievements, individual traits, and special accomplishments, such as outstanding performance in the arts and sciences. Summary descriptions of the approaches to be used by the campuses follow.

- **UC Berkeley** will review every freshman application comprehensively, relying on two independent readers to evaluate academic and other qualifications in the context of extensive information about the student’s educational context. A broad and multifaceted definition of merit, placing greatest emphasis on academic criteria and including an assessment of contributions that a student will make to the intellectual or other aspects of campus life, will be central to the assessment of qualifications. An overall score ranging from 1 to 5 (1 being the highest) will be the basis of admissions decisions for the class. Cases on the margin and those that are particularly complex may receive a total of three to six reads.

- **UC Davis** will assign numerical values to academic and personal characteristics. Based on an initial quantification of academic and personal qualities, applicants whose initial score is well above the predictive cutoff score for the entering class for the particular term under review will be admitted. The remaining applications will be further evaluated on the criteria that are not electronically available, and the point score from the initial quantification will be augmented accordingly.

- **UC Irvine** will use a system that begins with a computer-assisted review of each student’s academic profile. Applicants will be assigned a computer-generated numerical score that is then verified by trained admissions readers. Exceptional students will be admitted without further review. For the remaining applicants, at least two evaluators will conduct a personal profile review to be used in conjunction with the academic profile review to fill out the rest of the class.

- **UCLA** will give students rankings on three dimensions—academic achievement, personal achievement, and life challenges. Primary importance will be placed on the GPA, the strength of the curriculum, and strengths observed in SAT II and AP exam scores. Additionally, a student’s ranking will be compared to summary academic data on all other applicants from the same school. A dossier review, which yields rankings of personal achievement and life challenges, will allow admissions officers to assess students’ intellectual growth and development, to account for an individual to perform despite adverse circumstances or obstacles, and to recognize individual special achievements in specific areas, such as the arts or sciences.

- **UC San Diego** will conduct comprehensive reviews in three phases. An initial machine-driven review will assign numerical values to a variety of academic and personal achievement factors. Those applicants who meet the highest level of academic and personal achievement will be admitted without further review. A second phase will consider all factors identified in the initial review, plus special achievements and personal challenges. Applicants with the highest level of academic and personal achievement will be admitted in sufficient numbers to meet the campus enrollment goals. San Diego will then give special consideration to applicants from San Diego and Imperial counties who fall in the top 4 percent of their high school senior class.

- **UC Santa Barbara** will generate numeric scores for each applicant that are verified by admissions readers. Applicants will then be arrayed by high school and top-ranking applicants from each accredited California high school will be admitted. Remaining eligible applicants will be given a full comprehensive review by at least two readers, leading to the admission of the strongest candidates. The comprehensive review will consist of an academic preparation review and an academic promise review. The academic promise review will consist of an
evaluation of a number of characteristics that are viewed within the context of the student’s socioeconomic background.

UC Riverside and UC Santa Cruz currently are able to admit all UC-eligible students who apply.

Cost/resources

How much would a change to comprehensive review cost per campus? How would these costs be borne? How can the University cover the cost when the Dual Admissions Program cannot be funded?

Just as the campuses would have different ways of implementing comprehensive review within the Academic Senate’s guidelines, the associated incremental costs would vary from campus to campus.

The 2001-02 State budget earmarked $750,000 for implementation of comprehensive review at UC. These funds were distributed equally to the six campuses that—because they receive more applications from UC-eligible students than they have spaces to enroll—must select from the pool of eligible students and, therefore, would use comprehensive review under the Academic Senate proposal.

On most of the campuses, these additional resources will be sufficient to provide for the incremental costs needed to implement the comprehensive review processes being envisioned for the Fall 2002 entering class. On the other campuses, the chancellors have indicated that they will make available sufficient resources to meet the additional costs above those received through the budget process. These are not substantial amounts, as they complement what already is in place on the campuses (most of which are already at some stage in the evolution toward comprehensive review, particularly in their Tier II review of applicants).

By comparison, implementation of the Dual Admissions Program would require much more substantial resources because the University would be developing a new initiative from its conception. The estimated annual cost of Dual Admissions is $2.5 million. (Additionally, implementation of the Dual Admissions Program also depends on resources that the California Community Colleges make available.)

Pace of change/motivation/desired outcomes

We need to define our desired outcomes. What do we want? Academic success? Higher persistence or graduation rates? An enriched college campus? Success in producing graduates in specific majors?

Regents’ policy RE-28 provides a foundation for this discussion. It states, in part, that “the University shall seek out and enroll, on each of its campuses, a student body that demonstrates high academic achievement or exceptional talent, and that encompasses the broad diversity of backgrounds characteristic of California.” Comprehensive review is the Academic Senate’s proposal for accomplishing this objective of The Regents.

The view of the Senate and the administration, in implementing Regental policy, is that the University seeks academically high-achieving and motivated students who are prepared for the rigors of a UC education and are poised to assume the societal leadership roles for which a UC education helps prepare them. These qualities cannot be fully assessed through a review of
quantitative measures alone, nor through any evaluation that focuses on a narrow range of criteria. (Further discussion of this issue is offered in the overview section of this document, which begins on page 1.)

**Well-rounded students are fine, but shouldn’t our emphasis be on scholarship?**

Academic accomplishment must and will remain at the heart of the admissions process. The Academic Senate, through its review of this proposal, has opined that academic accomplishment cannot be adequately or thoroughly reviewed based on an assessment of quantitative measures alone. The Senate has, rather, expressed the view that a more thorough evaluation of multiple factors is necessary—not for the purpose of determining well-roundedness or some other abstract measure of accomplishment, but for determining a student’s likelihood of succeeding at the University and for encouraging in prospective students the development of the attributes that will lead to success at the University.

**Why is comprehensive review being proposed now? Why has the proposal not been considered in the normal, deliberative process in which the University conducts other business?**

Comprehensive review is being proposed now for three reasons. First, the proposal responds to the language in RE-28, adopted by The Regents in May 2001, indicating that changes in UC admissions policy resulting from the repeal of SP-1 would be considered by the faculty and then brought to The Regents. Second, the proposal is the culmination of several years of discussion, in the Senate and elsewhere, regarding the best ways of admitting students to the University (see Attachment 1 for a chronology of events). And third, the underlying themes of the proposal are consistent with the other proposals The Regents have reviewed—the Eligibility in the Local Context (“4 Percent Plan”) and Dual Admissions Programs—which are based on the importance of viewing academic accomplishment in the context of the opportunities available to a particular student.

The Senate’s consideration of comprehensive review has been thorough. The systemwide Senate leadership emphasized to the campuses that all normal steps of the consultation process should be followed during the evaluation of the comprehensive review proposal, and the ways in which the campus reviews proceeded are described earlier in this document.

**Is this a backdoor affirmative action policy?**

No. The University does not anticipate any major changes in the ethnic composition of the admitted class as a result of comprehensive review.

Proposition 209 prohibits admissions officials from employing any consideration of race or ethnicity in making admissions decisions. The part of the application where an applicant indicates his or her race—information UC requests for tracking and statistical purposes—is removed before the application goes to any readers. And while it may be possible to discern the race of some students from other elements of the application, such as the essay or the applicant’s name, readers are instructed to disregard this information in reviewing the application in order to comply with State law.

**Is the University simply responding to external pressures?**

No. It is true that some members of the Legislature have encouraged UC to move toward a process of comprehensive review. But discussion of the concept was underway at the University before elected officials expressed their views on the subject. The attached chronology provides an outline of the course this discussion has taken.
ATTACHMENT 1

CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS
PROPOSAL FOR COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW

Fall 1995 – Joint faculty-administration Task Force on Undergraduate Admissions Criteria comments on the need for a review of “the methods used for assessing academic performance, beyond utilizing criteria such as the GPA and standardized test scores.” It also suggests that “the selection process could be altered in the future to include a more comprehensive approach to reviewing students’ academic accomplishments and personal backgrounds.”

Late 1990s – Several UC campuses establish or expand elements of comprehensive review in various portions of their selection processes, though still using the Tier I/Tier II system codified in Regents Resolution SP-1. (All selective campuses now use a form of comprehensive review in Tier II, and several employ elements of comprehensive review in Tier I.)

December 2000 – The statewide UC Freshman Admissions Policy Conference, co-chaired by the Chair of the Academic Council and the Vice President for Educational Outreach, in its conference report urges the University to place greater emphasis on a comprehensive assessment of all applicants and to review applicants’ achievements in the context of the opportunities and challenges they have experienced.

February 15, 2001 – President Atkinson writes to the Academic Council, asking that the faculty consider his recommendation that UC no longer require the SAT I in admissions and that “all campuses move away from admissions processes focused on quantitative formulas and instead adopt evaluative procedures that look at applicants in a comprehensive … way.” He also makes the proposal in an address to the American Council on Education in Washington, D.C., on February 18, 2001.

May 9, 2001 – UC Berkeley Chancellor Robert Berdahl, Berkeley Divisional Senate Chair David Dowall, and Berkeley faculty admissions committee Chair Calvin Moore write jointly to President Atkinson and the Academic Council, formally requesting an exemption from the requirement of Regents Resolution SP-1 that campuses select 50 to 75 percent of their applicants on “academic criteria alone,” in order to implement a “unitary policy” that would admit all applicants to Berkeley on the same full set of criteria.

May 16, 2001 – President Atkinson, after consulting with Academic Council Chair Michael Cowan, writes to Lieutenant Governor Cruz Bustamante and Assembly Speaker Robert Hertzberg, informing them that the faculty is considering his February recommendation and that any resulting changes would be effective for students entering UC in Fall 2002.

Summer and Fall 2001 – Faculty conduct review of the proposal for comprehensive review.
ATTACHMENT 2

UC SELECTION CRITERIA FOR FRESHMEN*

The academic criteria are:
1. High school grade point average in UC-required courses
2. Standardized test scores
3. Number of, content of and performance in academic courses completed beyond the University's minimum eligibility requirements
4. Number of, and performance in, honors and AP courses
5. Being identified as "eligible in the local context" by ranking in the top 4 percent of the high school class, as determined by the University's academic criteria
6. Quality of the senior year program, as measured by the type and number of academic courses in progress or planned
7. Quality of academic performance relative to educational opportunities available in the applicant's school
8. Outstanding performance in one or more academic subject areas
9. Outstanding work in one or more special projects in any academic field
10. Recent marked improvement in academic performance

The supplemental criteria are:
11. Special talents, achievements, and awards in a particular field, or experiences that demonstrate unusual promise for leadership or ability to contribute to the intellectual vitality of the campus
12. Completion of special projects that offer significant evidence of an applicant’s special effort and determination or that may indicate special suitability to an academic program on a specific campus
13. Academic accomplishments in light of an applicant's life experiences and special circumstances, such as disabilities, low family income, first generation to attend college, need to work, disadvantaged social or educational environment, difficult personal and family situations or circumstances, refugee status or veteran status
14. Location of the applicant's secondary school and residence, to provide for geographic diversity in the student population and to account for the wide variety of educational environments existing in California

* from the 1996 Guidelines for Implementation of University Policy on Undergraduate Admissions (revised May 2000)