

GUIDELINES FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF UNIVERSITY POLICY ON ADMISSION BY EXCEPTION for CALIFORNIA RESIDENTS

**Endorsed by the Academic Council on September 28, 2005
as submitted by the
Board of Admissions and Relations with Schools
(Am 1 April 2020)**

Through the history of the University of California, UC's eligibility and admissions policies have consistently acknowledged the value of maintaining some flexibility to admit California resident students who do not meet the University's strict numeric eligibility requirements, but nonetheless demonstrate high potential for academic success and leadership. This flexibility has traditionally been expressed as a percentage of total students who can be admitted "in exception" to traditional eligibility. Since 1991, this percentage has been fixed at 6 percent per year of new freshman enrollment and up to 6 percent of new advanced standing enrollment. Regents policy with respect to Admission by Exception for California residents was last modified in 1996, when 4 of the total 6 percent limit was set aside for students "from low socio-economic backgrounds or students having experienced limited educational opportunities" and the remaining 2 percent was reserved for "other students," traditionally understood to include students with special talents or special circumstances (e.g., veterans, adults, students with disabilities).¹

In April 2004, the Eligibility and Admissions Study Group, chartered by UC President Robert Dynes to examine undergraduate eligibility and admissions policies and implementation issues, issued its final findings and recommendations. Finding/Recommendation #3 addressed the University's Admission by Exception policy, reaffirming that "Admission by Exception provides an important access path for students with outstanding talent or achievements in particular areas, as well as those from nontraditional or disadvantaged educational backgrounds" and recommending that "the University retain the ability to utilize the full 6 percent of enrollments currently permitted."² The Study Group recommended that "BOARS re-examine current guidelines for the admission of ineligible students."

BOARS re-examined existing policy with respect to Admission by Exception for California residents in the spring of 2004 and drafted a set of Guidelines to assist campuses in identifying applicants who do not meet traditional eligibility criteria, but who merit consideration for Admission by Exception. These Guidelines pertain most directly to freshman applicants, though the general purpose of Admission by Exception is the same for transfer applicants. In October 2004 the draft Guidelines were circulated to directors of admissions and to faculty committees responsible for admissions policy on each campus. The Guidelines were subsequently revised in light of information from the campuses. The following statement represents BOARS' current understanding of the purposes of Admission by Exception, and the ways in which it is carried out in the multi-campus UC system.

¹ *Policy on Undergraduate Admissions by Exception*, issued July 1996. The Regents of the University of California. Available online at: <https://regents.universityofcalifornia.edu/governance/policies/2105.html>

² University of California Eligibility and Admissions Study Group, *Final Report to the President*, April 2004, p. 3. Available online at: https://senate.universityofcalifornia.edu/files/committees/boars/documents/studygroup_final0404.pdf

I. Principles Underlying the Guidelines for Admission by Exception for California Residents

Consistent with the historical purposes and use of Admission by Exception and with state and University policy as expressed in the Master Plan and in Regents Policy, BOARS reaffirms current Regents policy with respect to Admission by Exception and encourages campuses to consider admission of some California resident students who technically do not meet the minimum requirements for admission. More specifically, BOARS affirms the following principles with respect to Admission by Exception.

1. BOARS reaffirms existing Regents policy which states, “it is essential that campuses have the flexibility to admit a small proportion of students by exception to the eligibility requirements.” Because the purpose of Admission by Exception is to allow for some flexibility at the campus level, each campus may develop its own procedure for Admission by Exception, consistent with Regents policy and with these Guidelines. Procedures for Admission by Exception at each campus are naturally coordinated with that campus’s general procedures for Comprehensive Review of applications.
2. Admissions guarantees that apply to applicants who meet eligibility requirements do not apply to ineligible applicants. Campuses may review applications from students who do not meet eligibility requirements, and may admit some of these, but ineligible students who are not admitted by any UC campus to which they apply are not guaranteed admission to another campus within the UC system.
3. Admission by Exception provides a means to identify students who do not meet technical requirements for eligibility but who demonstrate strong likelihood of success at UC or exceptional potential to contribute to the University or the State of California. Technical standards for eligibility have the virtue of clarity and simplicity, but they are of necessity based on narrow criteria which do not recognize an applicant’s full set of achievements, talents, or personal circumstances. Therefore, some students who do not meet the eligibility requirements are better qualified for UC than some other students who do meet the eligibility criteria. Admission by Exception enables campuses to admit students who show promise that cannot be fully assessed using narrow quantitative criteria and without consideration of the student’s academic and personal context. This flexibility is particularly important during periods when the University is required by the ceiling on eligibility contained in the Master Plan to tighten requirements so as to exclude students who would have fully met UC requirements had they applied just one or two years earlier.
4. Coordination of Admission by Exception with Comprehensive Review at the campus level should guard against the unlikely event that applicants the campus determines to be less qualified for UC are admitted instead of applicants the campus determines to be more qualified. At the same time, campuses should ensure that Comprehensive Review does not automatically classify an application as non-competitive or non-reviewable solely because the applicant did not meet one or more of the formal criteria for eligibility.

5. As articulated in existing Regents policy, Admission by Exception also permits campuses to seek improvement in admission procedures by applying alternative criteria to small numbers of applicants and monitoring those students' subsequent performance at UC.

II. Recommendations

1. BOARS recommends that the current ceiling on Admission by Exception for California residents be maintained at 6 percent of newly enrolled students each year and that, as specified in Regents policy, within the overall limit of 6 percent, up-to-4 percent of these enrollments be reserved for students from disadvantaged circumstances, including but not limited to low-income students and first-generation college students (see criteria in section III below). The remaining up-to-2 percent may include "other students" to include students with special talent.
2. BOARS recommends that faculty admissions committees on each campus develop written policy statements describing their philosophy and approach to consideration of ineligible students who may be otherwise qualified. Campus procedures may allow for an initial, more abbreviated screening of some applications, to determine whether an applicant is a reasonable candidate for Admission by Exception. Section III below describes categories of students for whom at least an initial screening would be warranted.
3. As specified in current Regents policy, applicants who are being considered for Admission by Exception should be evaluated using the Comprehensive Review criteria included in the *University's Guidelines for Implementation of University Policy on Undergraduate Admissions*. In addition, campuses may wish to develop special additional procedures as needed to ensure that Admission by Exception candidates — whose backgrounds are, by definition, unusual in some way—receive a full enough review to determine accurately their level of qualification. For example, campuses may wish to conduct an augmented review, per [Regents Policy 2110](#), for applicants in this category.
4. All decisions must be approved by the admission director, another member of senior leadership in admissions or enrollment management, and a member of the Academic Senate external to the admission office (e.g., dean of the admitting college or chair of the campus admission committee), prior to students' enrollment.
5. Both campuses and BOARS should conduct periodic reviews to ensure that students admitted through the process are maintaining satisfactory academic success, that the goals of the process are being met, and that campus and University policies are being followed. Data on the outcomes for students admitted through Admission by Exception shall be reported by the campuses and the Office of the President and included in BOARS' annual report on the Comprehensive Review process.

III. Categories of California Resident Applicants to be Considered for Admission by Exception

1. Applicants who have overcome personal challenges that have affected their ability to meet UC eligibility requirements and who demonstrate strong potential for success at UC. This category includes students who have demonstrated high academic achievement or exceptional personal talent in spite of circumstances that might include (but would not be limited to) low income or other economic disadvantage, families with very limited educational resources or experience (including parents who did not graduate from college), high schools with generally low levels of academic performance, sudden adversity, or disability. Other applicants in this category would include veterans, adults, refugees, or students who are wards of the court or have lived in foster care.
2. Applicants from nontraditional high school settings in California that have adversely affected their ability to complete UC's eligibility requirements, but who nonetheless demonstrate strong potential for success at UC. For example, such settings might include (but would not be limited to) charter schools; independent study; schools that use alternative assessment procedures such as narrative or portfolio-based reviews; alternative or continuation schools; small schools or small learning communities within larger high schools; unaccredited schools; and home schooling.
3. Applicants who demonstrate extraordinary talent in a specific academic area such as mathematics, writing, science, or language.
4. Applicants who demonstrate other exceptional talent, accomplishment, or potential in specific areas such as performing arts, athletics, leadership, or contribution to the community.
5. Applicants whose enrollment would enable campuses to establish new majors or academic programs.
6. Applicants who have achieved academically at a level equivalent to those of UC-eligible applicants but who have narrowly missed meeting one or more of UC's admission requirements, generally for a technical reason such as late or missing test scores when the applicant has otherwise demonstrated proficiency.

BOARS recommends that candidates who qualify under criterion #1 or #2 be considered for the up-to-4 percent of enrollments reserved in Regents policy for "students from low socio-economic backgrounds or students having experienced limited educational opportunities." Candidates who do not qualify under criteria #1 or #2 but who do qualify under one or more other criteria would be included in the remaining up-to-2 percent allowed for Admission by Exception.

Campuses will identify and track all California residents who are known to be missing one or more of UC's eligibility requirements, but are selected for admission, and include rationale under these guidelines. Additional students confirmed to be missing one or more requirements during the final academic verification process, after admission but prior to enrollment, will be classified as Admission by Exception post-admission.

The Admission by Exception rate is calculated separately on newly enrolled 1) freshmen and 2) advanced standing (transfer) students and will not exceed the percentages allowed per Regents policy 2105 and the percent allowable under the disadvantage (4%) and other (2%) categories. The rate is determined independently for each level by taking the number of new enrolled students classified as Admission by Exception, divided by the total new enrolled students for that level for the full academic year. The percentage of admitted Admission by Exception students may exceed the allowed rate if the eventual enrolled student percentage is within the allowable range per Regents policy.

Campuses will include a summary of Admission by Exception for California residents as part of their annual Comprehensive Review report to BOARS.