California Postsecondary Education Commission

Factors Limiting Eligibility for the University of California

December 2004

An analysis in response to a request from the Assembly Higher Education Committee

In April 2004, the Postsecondary Education Commission released its 2003 University Eligibility study. This study estimated the percentage of California public high school graduates who met the admission requirements of the California State University and the University of California. The Assembly Higher Education Committee requested that the Commission conduct a further analysis to examine how individual elements of UC's admission requirements prevent high school graduates who meet most of the requirements from becoming fully eligible. The Commission's main findings are as follows:

- The SAT II is the most important limitation on eligibility for graduates who meet most, but not all, of UC's admission requirements. Over 6% of the graduating class of 2003, or an estimated 21,000 graduates, met all of UC's other admission requirements but did not take the SAT II.
- Course omissions are the second most important limitation on eligibility. Nearly 2% of the graduating class of 2003 had grades and test scores that were high enough to meet UC's eligibility index, but were ineligible because they had one course deficiency.
- The most common deficiencies among graduates with a single course deficiency were the Visual and Performing Arts requirement and the English requirement.
- The GPA and test score requirements in UC's eligibility index are not a major limitation on eligibility for graduates who completed all of the *a–g* courses and took all of the required tests. Only about 0.4% of the graduating class of 2003 completed all of the required courses and tests, but failed to qualify because their GPAs or test scores were too low to meet the index.

UC recently tightened its admission requirements in an effort to bring its eligibility rate closer to the Master Plan recommendation. The most significant change was to change to a more restrictive method of calculating applicants' GPAs.

Under the new requirements, the percentage of graduates who do not meet a particular requirement will differ somewhat from the numbers presented here, but the relative importance of each limitation on eligibility is about the same. For example, fewer than 6% of graduates would fail to qualify for the University solely because they had not taken the SAT II. With the new requirements, fewer graduates overall would have a high enough GPA to meet the eligibility index. Nevertheless, the SAT II is still a more important limitation on eligibility than course deficiencies.

Details of the Commission's results are in the table on page 3.

The Assembly Higher Education Committee's request

This analysis was done in response to a request (see page 6) from Assemblymember Carol Liu, Chair of the Assembly Higher Education Committee, for the following information:

- What percent of high school graduates were not eligible for UC simply because they were missing three or fewer of the required *a–g* courses?
- What percent of high school graduates were not eligible for UC only because they did not meet the new visual and performing arts requirement that was effective for students entering in Fall 2003?
- What percent of high school graduates were not eligible only because they did not meet the university's new requirements for a second year of social science or a second year of laboratory science?
- What percent of high school graduates were not eligible only because they did not take at least seven of the required 15 course units in the last two years of high school?
- What percent of high school graduates with a Grade Point Average of 3.5 or higher were not eligible only because they did not meet the University's test requirements?

Reasons for ineligibility

The Commission's results show the percentage of high school graduates who meet most, but not all, of UC's admission requirements. Many more graduates were ineligible because they lacked several of UC's requirements. This analysis shows how individual elements of the requirements limit the eligibility of otherwise well-qualified public high school graduates.

Course issues

About 2.4% of California public high school class of 2003 took all of the required tests, had a combination of grades and test scores that met UC's eligibility index, but were ineligible because they had up to three course deficiencies. Nearly all of these graduates had only one course deficiency. Most of the others had two course deficiencies. Very few students who took all of the required tests had more than two course deficiencies.

Among the graduates with a single deficiency, the new Visual and Performing Arts requirement was the most common deficiency. The English requirement was second. No other single-subject deficiency exceeded 0.2% of graduates.

A very small percentage of graduates failed to qualify only because they lacked the second year of social science or laboratory science that UC added to its coursework requirements in 1990.

Test issues

About 15% of public high school graduates completed all of the *a–g* course requirements with a GPA of 3.5 or higher. Most of these graduates had taken all of the required tests and were fully eligible. Just over a quarter—or 4.0% of all graduates—had not taken all of the required tests and were ineligible. Most of these ineligible graduates had taken the SAT I or ACT, but not the SAT II.

Many graduates with lower GPAs also missed becoming eligible because they did not take the SAT II. Overall, about 6.3% of total graduates failed to qualify because they did not take the SAT II. These are high school graduates who completed all of UC's *a–g* course requirements, took the SAT I or ACT, and had GPAs and test scores that would qualify them for admission if

Results of the Commission's analysis

Category	Estimated number	Percent of graduates
Graduates who are fully eligible for UC	48,400	14.4%
Graduates with up to three course deficiencies (a)		
Total	8,100	2.4%
One course deficiency	6,500	1.9
Deficiency in visual and performing arts	2,400	0.7
Deficiency in English	1,800	0.5
No second year of social science	100	z
No second year of laboratory science	300	0.1
Two course deficiencies	1,200	0.4
Three course deficiencies	400	0.1
Graduates who did not take seven of the required units in the last two years of high school (a)	200	0.1
Graduates with all courses and a GPA of 3.5 or higher (b)		
Total	50,200	15.0%
Fully eligible for UC	36,900	11.0
Ineligible because of test omissions		
SAT I but no SAT II	9,900	2.9
Other test omission or scores too low	3,400	1.1
Graduates who met all requirements except for taking the SAT II (c)		
Would be eligible had they taken the SAT II and achieved a score equal to or better than their score in the SAT I or ACT	21,100	6.3%
Would need a higher score in the SAT II to meet the index	5,900	1.8
Graduates who missed the index (d)		
Would be eligible with 0.2 higher GPA or 60 higher score	1,300	0.4%
Grades and scores below this margin	100	z

a—Graduates in these categories took all of the required tests and met UC's eligibility index when the index was based on their best-of-pattern GPA. A smaller number of graduates would be in these categories if the index were based on the all-courses GPA.

b—GPA is the best-of-pattern GPA. Fewer students would be in this category if the lower limit were an all-courses GPA of 3.5.

c—Fewer graduates would fall into this category if the index were based on the all-courses GPA.

d—Graduates in this category took all of the required tests and completed all of the required courses. More graduates would be in this category if the index were based on the all-courses GPA.

z—Greater than zero, but rounds to zero.

they had taken the SAT II and achieved a score equal to or better than their score in the SAT I or ACT. An additional 1.8% of graduates met all of the requirements except for the SAT II, but would need a higher score on the SAT II than they got on the SAT I to meet UC's eligibility index.

Eligibility index

Achieving the GPA and test scores needed to meet UC's eligibility index is a less important limitation on eligibility than actually taking the courses and tests. Only about 0.4% of 2003 graduates took all of the required courses and tests but were ineligible because their grades or scores were too low. Nearly all these graduates were fairly near the index line and would be eligible with a 0.2 higher GPA or a 60-point higher score on the SAT.

Recent changes in UC's admission requirements

UC recently tightened its admission requirements to bring its eligibility rate closer to the figure recommended in the state's Master Plan for Higher Education. The Commission's 2003 Eligibility Study, released in May 2004, found that 14.4% of public high school graduates were eligible for UC. The Master Plan recommended that UC take its freshmen from the top 12.5% of public high school graduates.

After the release of the 2003 Eligibility Study, UC changed the way an applicant's GPA is calculated. Until 2004, UC used a *best-of-pattern* GPA, based on the applicant's best grades in courses meeting the *a–g* requirements. UC now uses an *all-courses* GPA, based on all grades in *a–g* courses taken in the 10th and 11th grades. For most students, the all-courses GPA will be lower than the best-of-pattern GPA previously used because the best-of-pattern calculation allows poorer grades to be left out of the calculation. UC has also announced that for applicants entering in fall 2007, the minimum GPA required for admission will be raised from 2.8 to 3.0.

GPAs calculated using the new method were not available from the 2003 study, so the results of this analysis are relative to the 2003 requirements. Figures relative to the current requirements will differ slightly from those shown on page 3. However, the change in the GPA calculation is not likely to affect the conclusions regarding which of UC's requirements are most important in limiting eligibility.

The Commission's analysis

For the 2003 University Eligibility Study, the Commission, the California State University and the University of California collected a sample of 16,000 transcripts from the public high school graduating class of 2003. CSU and UC reviewed these transcripts and provided the Commission with files containing eligibility information for each graduate in this sample. The file provided by UC included information such as in the number of units taken in courses meeting each of the *a–g* categories, each graduate's best-of-pattern GPA as calculated by UC and each graduate's scores on the ACT and SAT.

For this analysis, the Commission used the test scores and course information for each graduate in the sample to determine if the graduate fell into the categories listed in the table on page 3. The number and percentage of graduates statewide in each of these categories was estimated using the same procedure as was used in the 2003 Eligibility Study. More details of the way that students were sampled and the procedure used to estimate statewide values are in the Commission reports listed in *References*.

References

California Department of Education. *A Master Plan for Higher Education in California, 1960–1975.* 1960

California Postsecondary Education Commission. *University Eligibility Study for the Class of 2003.* May 2004.

California Postsecondary Education Commission. *Moving the Goalposts: The Potential Effects of Changes in the University of California's Admissions Requirements.* November 2004.

See **www.cpec.ca.gov/eligibility** *for links to these reports*

The Assembly Higher Education Committee's letter to the Commission

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June 28, 2004

Mr. Murray Haberman
Acting Executive Director
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Dear Mr. Haberman:

My thanks to you and your colleagues at the Commission for your presentation to the Assembly Higher Education Committee on June 1, 2004, regarding the Commission's 2003 Eligibility Study. The information you presented was helpful and informative for the Committee members, and we will continue to consider the implications of the conclusions presented through the Commission's research.

There are a few areas where I would like the Commission to provide further analysis of the current eligibility standards. I am particularly concerned with identifying reasons why otherwise academically talented students are deemed not fully eligible by the segments. Specifically:

- What percent of the total high school graduates that earned a Grade Point Average of 3.5 or higher (as calculated by University of California (UC) based on A through G courses taken in grades 10 through 12) were deemed not eligible by UC simply because they did not meet the University's Scholastic Aptitude Test requirements?

- What percent of the total high school graduates were deemed not eligible by UC simply because they were missing three or fewer of the required A through G courses? What percent of total high school graduates were deemed not eligible by UC only because they did not satisfy the new visual and performing arts requirement?

- What percent of total high school graduates were deemed not eligible by UC simply because they did not take at least seven of the required 15 course units in the last two years of high school?

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- What percent of total high school graduates were deemed not eligible by UC simply because they were missing three or fewer of the required A through G courses? What percent of total high school graduates were deemed not eligible by UC simply because they did not satisfy at least one of the university's new requirements (second year of social science and a second year of lab science)?

I believe these questions are consistent with the Supplemental Report Language in the 2003-04 budget package, calling for in-depth analyses of course-taking patterns, grades, and test scores within a school and schools relative to each other.

It would be helpful to have this information prior to January 1, 2005, in preparation for January Committee hearings that we will be holding. Thank you for your assistance on this issue.

Sincerely,

CAROL LIU
Chair, Assembly Higher Education Committee

CJL:lb