

THE UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA--MISSOULA

Plan to Enhance Admissions Standards

Approved April, 2002

The Admissions Standards Subcommittee was charged by the Enrollment Management Council to develop a plan to increase the admissions standards to The University of Montana. The subcommittee worked within several parameters that eventually led to a multi-year and phased plan. These parameters are:

1. The Montana Board of Regents admissions policy states that traditional-aged freshmen, students meet or exceed one of the following: 2.5 high school GPA, or 22 Composite ACT score; or 1030 Combined SAT score; or placing in the upper half of their graduating class.
2. It is imperative that The University of Montana maintains a critical enrollment level to remain financially stable.
3. Any University policy must be cognizant of the potential burden placed upon resources, especially those directed toward academic remediation.
4. The University is interested in attracting students from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and skill-sets that may not be fairly reflected in standardized measures of academic capability.
5. Any change of this magnitude should be supported with data, especially in evaluating an individual's potential for success.
6. Changes in access to the University have traditionally been advertised and adopted over a four-year period to allow high schools adequate transition time.

The subcommittee utilized a model called the Admissions Index Grid adopted from various public systems in the West including those in Utah, Washington and Idaho. The grid uses the high school cumulative grade point average (GPA) and standard test scores as its axes. Standard ACT and SAT concordance tables were utilized to establish an even basis for students who submitted one over the other. Three years of incoming student data were used to plot the number of students falling into the intersection point of each axis. The success and persistence rates of these students were determined by overall GPA after the first and second semester and their continued enrollment. These analyses formed the basis for developing a five-phase plan to reach our goal of improving the academic quality of students entering The University of Montana. Each phase is designed to give more data in which to implement the next phase from a statistical basis and a behavioral analysis.

Phase I

Phase I introduces a new admissions status called "Provisional Acceptance". Students assigned to this category are deficient in all of the Regents standards described above. Each year, approximately 100 students present an academic profile that does not meet the current standards but shows compelling evidence that they may be successful at The University of Montana. For example, students in this category may have had a difficult start in their high school careers but have finished their final one or two years above the admission standard level.

In the past, these students were fully admitted to the University through the established Regents' exemption policy at the discretion of the Executive Director of Enrollment Services. These students will still be admitted to the University but under the new status of "Provisional". It should be noted that many students who do not meet the admissions standards are denied admission. It should also be noted that the status of "Provisional" does not preempt a student from receiving financial aid as to not

discriminate by socio-economic status. Provisional students are informed of their status via the acceptance letter, which brings to their attention that their acceptance is provisional and encourages them to seek the extra academic assistance currently available to all new students through the Freshman Triad such as Freshman Seminar, Freshman Interest Groups and or tutoring and the advising available at the University College. Our premise is that by presenting risk factors early to these students they will respond by seeking out services, advising and, perhaps, developing motivation to succeed in school. A potential consequence of this status is that students admitted provisionally will choose not to enroll at UM if they are fully accepted elsewhere. There is some concern about the “stigma effect” that this status will have on some students. Students are allowed to remain on provisional status for only two semesters (one year). To attain full admission status, students must complete 24 credits and earn a cumulative GPA of 2.0 or greater during those two semesters.

Phase I has been implemented for the Fall of 2002 and data collection will begin September 2002. A decision to move to Phase II could be made as soon as January 2003 with implementation tentatively set for the Fall of 2004.

Phase I Assessment Outcomes

Phase I as a pilot program has several objectives for data collection. First, the new admissions status allows us to monitor this group as an established cohort who received the same information and opportunities for assistance. We will be able to gauge the acceptance of this special status by those who enroll against previous years’ matriculation rates. Surveys will be sent to enrollees and non-enrollees to help determine the perceptions of this new status. Of those who enroll, we will be able to track those who sought out services and compare the outcomes with those who didn’t. Finally, we will be able to compare the overall success and persistence rate with this cohort as compared to past classes.

Phase II

Roughly speaking, Phase II (see Figure 1) expands the number of Provisional Admits to include students who meet one of the Regents’ standards but are significantly deficient in the other (GPA or test score). Data show that these students are statistically at greater risk for failure than those who meet both standards. Those who fit the profile of Phase I will be included in the same manner as described above. Historically, approximately 10% of incoming freshman fall into the provisional admit category defined by Phase II (a typical incoming freshman class comprises approximately 1500 students). The potential enrollment impact of this number will depend upon the reaction of both students in this category (negative reaction could reduce the number of people who actually enroll) and the students who exceed our standards (positive reaction to increased level of institutional selectivity). An increase in the number of premier scholarships for high achieving students would help to encourage a shift in population from the provisional region of the chart to the admit region of the chart in future freshman classes. An analysis of other institutions that have increased admissions standards have typically shown an immediate decline in enrollment with a steady increase in subsequent years. These institutions have usually declined access to those who failed to meet the new standards, however. The students admitted provisionally during this phase will not be denied access to any University program but many will likely be admitted fully to other University System units. In this phase, provisional students will again be informed of the services available to them and will be notified of the consequences of not achieving academic success.

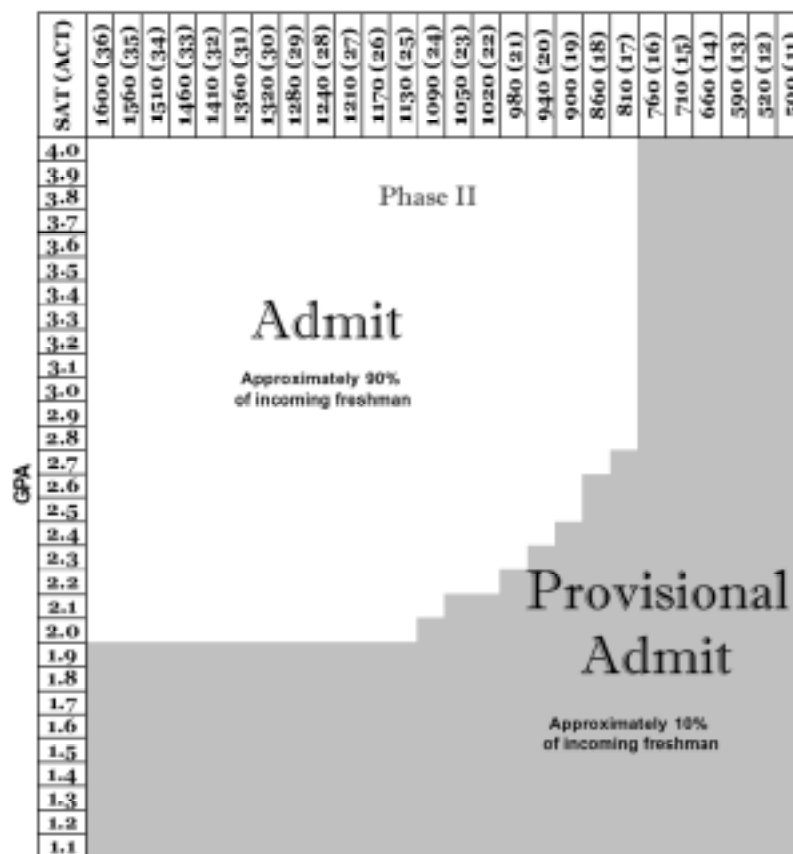


Figure 1 – Phase II admission grid. Note that percentages refer to historical averages not projections.

Phase II Assessment Outcomes

The same data will be processed as in Phase I with careful examination of the additional students at risk as compared to previous years’ cohorts. The most telling difference is the addition of students who expected to receive full admission to the University under Regents’ policy. Students admitted provisionally under Phase I knew that because they did not meet all the standards, there was a strong chance that they might not be accepted. Provisional students who meet the current Regents’ standards may react negatively to the provisional status. It is essential that the provisional option is well advertised and presented in a positive manner and resources be allocated to attract high achieving students. We will monitor the impact on applications and enrollment carefully before moving to Phase III.

Information concerning “Provisional” status vs. “Admit” status in Phase II

- Based on data from 1999-2000, incoming freshman who fall into the “Provisional” category in Figure 1 are twice as likely to earn a GPA below 2.0 in their first semester at the University than those students in the “Admit” category.
- Based on data from 1999-2000, incoming freshman who fall into the “Provisional” category in Figure 1 are 2-3 times more likely to either drop out or be placed on academic suspension by the end of their second semester than those students in the “Admit” category.

- Based on data from 1999-2000, no apparent bias exists between students in the “Provisional” vs. “Admit” categories in the areas of gender, residency, or ethnic status.
- In a study of incoming freshman for 1994 and 1995, using the criteria of Figure 1, the six-year graduation rate for students who fell into the “Admit” category was 2-3 times higher than the six-year graduation rate for students who fell into the “Provisional” category.

Phase III

In Phase III, the region of the grid that indicates a provisional admission will expand as shown in Figure 2. Historically this region represents approximately 15% of incoming freshman (approximately

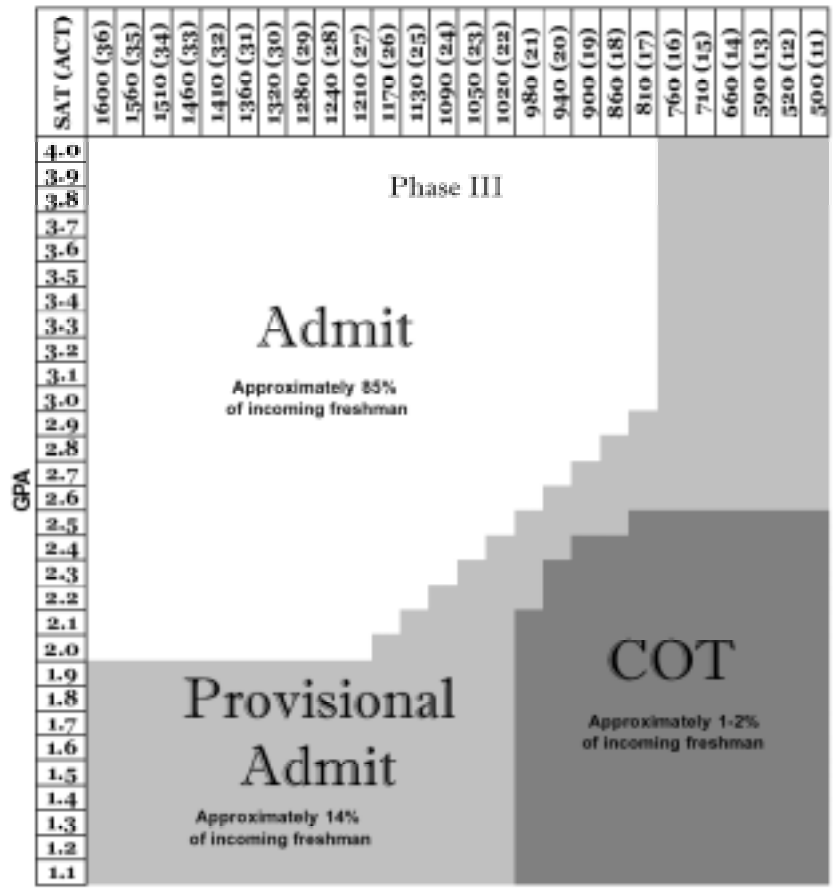


Figure 2 – Phase III admission grid. Note that percentages are historic averages not projections.

225 students). Students will be required to present an acceptable combination of high school GPA and test scores to be fully admitted. This phase will also introduce the concept of admitting students who are deficient in both standards (the provisional admits of Phase I) to the College of Technology (shown in dark gray on the grid) to determine whether they can develop the skills to be successful at the Mountain Campus. Historically this region represents 1-2% of incoming freshman (15-30 students). Some students may be granted special exemptions to attend the Mountain campus on a case-by-case basis under special circumstances. Implicit in this proposal is a greater utilization of the “community college” aspect of the COT for placing students who require remediation before full admission to the Mountain Campus.

Phase III Assessment Outcomes

By the time Phase III is assessed we should have comprehensive data indicating the success of the intervention aspects of this plan. We will have data on the recruitment enrollment and retention of various cohorts. We will begin to assess the outcomes of diverting some students to the COT as well as their success rates and ability to move to full admittance to the Mountain Campus. The data may be substantial enough to move forward to the Board of Regents with a plan to increase the minimum standards as a policy, which is the basis of Phase IV.

Phase IV

Phase IV significantly increases the minimum standards to be admitted to The University of Montana (see Figure 3). Students will typically exceed the current Regents’ standards in order to gain full admittance to UM. A greater number of those admitted provisionally under Phase III will be granted admissions to the COT only. Historically, the region in Figure 3 labeled “COT” and the region labeled

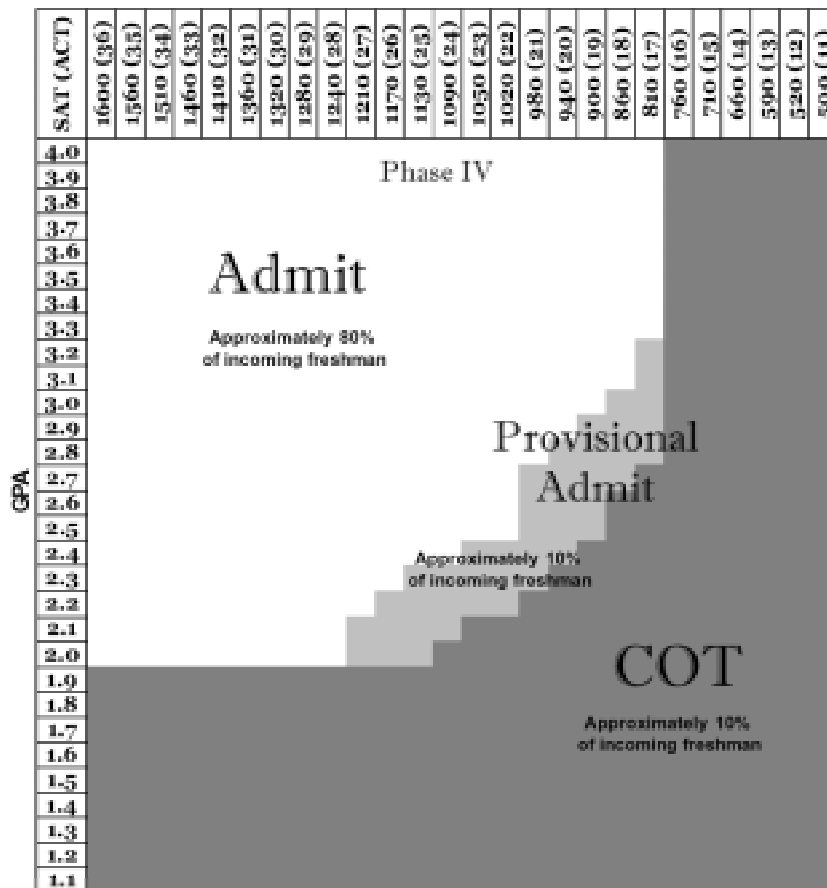


Figure 3 – Phase IV admissions grid. Note that percentages are historic averages not projections.

“Provisional” each represent approximately 10% of the incoming freshman class (i.e. approximately 150 students in each of the gray and dark gray regions).

Phase IV Assessment Outcomes

In Phase IV, The University of Montana becomes a selective institution as classified by many external agencies. We will be essentially turning away a greater number of applicants. The positive outcome can be measured by an increase in the application rate and admission rate of highly qualified students. Throughput results could be seen in increased academic success in the classroom, less need for remediation programs and higher graduation rates.

Conclusion

The overall goal of this proposal is threefold. First, is to increase the academic quality of our incoming students. Secondly, UM must maintain its enrollment goals in order to meet budgetary needs. In order to accomplish both we must gradually increase standards over a period of time, support “at-risk” students with existing resources and capitalize on the prestige associated with becoming a selective campus. This may mean increasing the amount of financial assistance in the form of merit-based scholarships in order to compete for high-achieving students as well as expanding our markets to reach greater numbers of qualified prospects.