

COUNSELOR UPDATE

Fall 2006



THE UNIVERSITY
of
WISCONSIN
MADISON

From the Director



Rob Seltzer, Ph.D.

In recent months, there has been quite a bit of media attention concerning proposed changes to the University of Wisconsin System's admission policy. As part of the UW–Madison are

impacted by shifts that take place within the system. However, this proposed change toward holistic application review will not impact us as we have always used a holistic approach to admission and will continue to do so.

Inherent to holistic application review is the fact that admission counselors look beyond grade point averages and test scores in an effort to get a complete sense of the applicant's academic and personal record. Deeper questions are asked such as, "How rigorous was the student's course work?" and "In what kinds of volunteer work was the student involved?"

While recognizing there is more to a student than his or her grades, academics are still the most important consideration in a holistic review. The bar is not lowered, and in my opinion, the result is that stronger students are selected.

Because we've been successfully using the holistic approach all along, we've found it creates a well-rounded student body and ultimately yields a better education, learning environment, and college experience for everyone.

Our review process is both competitive and selective. Our admission counselors review each application individually, looking for students with a wide range of achievements in and outside the classroom. In all, there are six main criteria that our counselors consider when reviewing an application:

1. Rigor of Course Work

Applicants must complete specific course requirements. In addition, a student who had a more rigorous course load may have a lower GPA than a student with easier course work. We take that into account.

2. Academic GPA

We look for students who earn good grades and maintain a high level of achievement in challenging course work.

3. Grade Trends

The pattern of grades over time is important. An increasingly strong academic record improves the likelihood of admission; a downward trend diminishes it.

4. Class Rank

We request class rank from all applicants and consider rank in our decision. Admission data indicates that those who provide rank are more likely to be admitted.

5. Test Scores (ACT or SAT)

Students need to provide results from either the ACT or SAT, including a standardized writing test.

6. Nonacademic Qualifications

We look for students who demonstrate qualities such as leadership and concern for others in the community; achievement in the arts, athletics, and other areas; diversity in personal background and experience; and a family legacy of success at UW–Madison.

This year's media attention and public scrutiny regarding holistic application review within the UW System confirmed to me once again that our long-standing philosophy of admission here at UW–Madison is the right one. We are one of many schools around the country that have relied on holistic admission for several decades. The result is a steady flow of exceptional students who bring varied experiences and the hunger for learning that make UW–Madison one of the finest universities in the country.

Freshman Class of 2006 Profile

We're pleased to report another very successful year for our Office of Admissions. Despite receiving a record-high number of applications from prospective first-year students, we hit our enrollment target of 5,600 almost exactly with 5,643 new freshmen. The class of 2006 is also very diverse by many measures. While 60% of the class is from the state of Wisconsin, we have students enrolling from 46 other states and more than 30 different countries. Some other points of note include:

- We received 22,816 applications from prospective first-year students, the highest number in university history.
- We offered admission to 13,322 students (a 58% admit rate), and enrolled a freshman class of 5,643 (a 42% yield).
- Applications from students of color rose 9% over last year, and this year's freshman class is projected to have the largest percentage of students of color in history, with 802 students or 14.2% of the total class.

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Does It Pay to Wait?



Tom Reason
Associate Director

Nobody said this job was going to be easy. In fact, it seems to be getting harder. The job I speak of—the work of our Office of Admissions—is to bring in the freshman class each year. When I think about this task, I'm reminded of the

story of *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*. This is because the class cannot be too big, it cannot be too small, and it must have just the right flavor and temperament.

One thing that makes this process difficult is the ever-increasing pressure for students and families to make the “right” decision. We also have students who attend summer orientation and then withdraw, as well as those who submit deposits at multiple universities. Add to that the fluctuating economy, a lack of financial aid, natural disasters, and the simple but real fact that life is complicated. The result is great difficulty in creating a freshman class of the right size and composition.

At the Office of Admissions, we are left with the challenge of predicting what our applicant pool will look like. Will applications go up? What should our admission guidelines be? What will our yield be? Answering these questions with any real accuracy is impossible. So we have to carefully feel our way along.

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- Over half (57%) of our incoming freshmen ranked in the top tenth of their class. Close to 300 students ranked in the top 1%. The average ACT score was 27.6 and the average SAT was 1884, both much higher than the national averages of 21.1 and 1518 respectively.
- More than 4,875 students (87%) submitted AP scores for credit, the highest number on record.
- The nonacademic qualifications were also exceptional. More than 69% worked a part-time job, 64% earned a varsity letter, 54% received a leadership award, 53% performed with a musical group, and 23% received a community service award.

One of the tools we have used for a long time is the postponement process. We tell a certain set of applicants, those we believe could ultimately be a good fit at UW, that they will have to wait until March for a decision so we can see if we have enough space in our class. This process serves us and students well. It helps us manage enrollment while still offering the opportunity to attend to as many students as possible.

Yet, unfortunately, this enrollment tool doesn't seem to be quite enough these days. In the fall of 2005, we over-enrolled by a fair number of students. For this past fall, we had to be very sure that it didn't happen again. As such, we approached this year's freshman class even more cautiously, being very careful not to admit too many. We were cautious enough that after the May 1 enrollment deposit deadline, we realized that limited space was still available. We give most students who are not admitted from our postponed group the option of being put on

an extended waitlist. Some of those who were willing and responded were rewarded for their patience. In late June and July, they were admitted from the waitlist. This is only the second time in my long tenure at Wisconsin that we have admitted waitlisted students.

I believe the handwriting is on the wall. With the increased unpredictability of this process, it seems likely we will be going to our waitlist more often than we have in the past. Will it be every year? That's doubtful. But there certainly is a greater possibility than there has been in the past. To be on the extended waitlist is a tenuous position and students absolutely must have enrollment options in place. By the same token, if a student really wants to come to Wisconsin, it's in their best interest to get on the extended waitlist and see what happens. For some this year, and likely more in the future, it paid to wait.

Rank or No Rank

By Tom Reason
Associate Director

We are often asked for an opinion on the importance of class rank. Fewer schools are providing us with this valuable bit of information each year. Before I get directly to the matter, I'm compelled to address a bit of background information. The entire college admission process is a matter of economics. Simple supply and demand, with the bottom line being that space is finite.

The way by which schools choose to assess their students does not affect our space. Thus, the idea that by eliminating rank more students will be admitted does not make sense. However, when rank is eliminated, it *may* change who *does* get admitted.

In terms of our admission process, the more information we have, the better decision we can make. We deny no one solely on the basis of their class rank. However, if rank is not supplied, we rely more heavily on other factors, including:

1. **Curriculum.** This is the first thing we look at whether we have rank or not. Rigor of course work is a key factor in our admission process. Minimal course work equals a reduced chance of admission. Without rank, rigor of course work becomes even more important.

2. **GPA.** We all know this has become compressed at best and inflated at worst. It is difficult to discern differences among students.
3. **Test scores.** It is an absolute given that as other factors become unavailable test scores will become more important.

The less information we receive the more time it takes to make a decision and the more cautious we become. If your school does not provide us with class rank, fewer of your students will be admitted. Students from other schools that do provide class rank may be admitted instead. And lastly, more of your students may have their decision postponed, because with less information, we need to be more careful in making decisions.

If your school no longer provides class rank, we ask that you provide us with a good high school profile that will give us insight into a particular student's relative performance. Scatter grams, grade distribution charts, decile ranges, and other tools go a long way in helping us make good decisions.

We understand the politics of this issue. It is certainly up to each school and/or district to decide if it will provide class rank or not. We will work with what we are given, but we absolutely do prefer having class rank.

The Transfer Road to Madison



Mary Schey
Assistant Director

We continually explore new ways to broaden access to UW–Madison. Our most recent efforts include transfer contracts with three Wisconsin Technical Colleges.

The transfer contract can be a wonderful option for students who know they eventually want to earn a UW–Madison degree but need to start elsewhere for any number of reasons. Some students wish to begin at a college closer to home, some have financial constraints, and some may not receive an offer of admission at the freshman level. Whatever the reason, students will want to consider one of the multiple transfer options available to them, including our new transfer contract.

Here's how it works: Students enroll in the Liberal Arts Transfer Program at MATC–Madison, MATC–Milwaukee, or Nicolet College–Rhinelander. During their first year, they sign up for the UW–Madison Transfer Contract program. In response, we send a packet of materials designed to help the student meet the requirements of the contract and prepare for transfer to UW–Madison.

The requirements of the contract include:

- **Completion of 54 credits in the liberal arts transfer program**
(Within these credits, students complete nine courses satisfying general education requirements in communication, quantitative reasoning, literature, humanities, social studies, physical science, biological science, and ethnic studies.)
- **Cumulative 3.0 GPA**
(Students earning 2.6–2.99 will receive special consideration for admission.)
- **Minimum high school units**
(These units include algebra, plane geometry, college preparatory math, and two years in a single foreign language.)

The value of the transfer contract is twofold—it provides a way for students to ensure their admission as a transfer student and it guides students in building the academic foundation necessary for success at UW–Madison. For more detailed information on the Transfer Contract, please visit www.admissions.wisc.edu/transfer.php and select the *Transfer Agreements* link.

In addition to the transfer contracts, we provide several other transfer options. They include:

UW–Madison Connections Program

In this program, select Wisconsin residents who applied for freshman admission are offered the opportunity to start at one of 16 campuses (UW Colleges and Wisconsin Technical Colleges). During their first two years, students receive many of the services and privileges afforded new freshmen here on campus. Students then transition to UW–Madison to complete their junior and senior years.

Guaranteed Transfer Program

Students who begin their education at the UW Colleges may sign up for this program. Those who have satisfied minimum high school units in math and foreign language and complete 54 credits at the UW Colleges with a 2.6 GPA will be guaranteed admission.

Transfer Admission

Each year we welcome close to 2,000 new transfer students. We look for minimum high

school units in math and foreign language, at least 24 transferable credits, breadth of course work, consistent academic achievement and at least a 3.0 GPA.

The transfer route is a good choice for many students. If you or one of your students needs more information about our transfer options, please feel free to call me directly at 608/262–2365 or e-mail us at transfer@admissions.wisc.edu.

Save the Date

April 25, 2007

Wisconsin Counselor Visit Day

Mark your calendar to join us for a day of information and fun. High school counselors from throughout the state will be invited to campus to meet with our admission counselors, as well as representatives from our schools and colleges and housing and financial aid offices. Registration information will be included in the winter issue of this *Counselor Update* newsletter.

More Information Yields More Diversity



Carlos Reyes
Assistant Director

Major efforts are underway to increase diversity on campus. This past year the Office of Admissions enrolled the largest number of students of color in the history of the university. In the continuing effort to identify and recruit

minority students, our staff has utilized several approaches to encourage students to apply and continue their education. As this effort takes shape and we go out to meet with students, counselors, and parents, several questions and some myths arise regarding students of color, college admission, and higher education in general. I'd like to address one such myth, namely that minority students apply to college late or not at all because they and their families do not value higher education.

This could not be further from the truth. Minority populations are strong supporters of their children and education. Students of color and their parents and influencers understand the value of a higher education. Yet, because of years of exclusion from the educational process, many are not familiar

with college admission and the steps necessary to apply. Language barriers, economic barriers, and a lack of experience in accessing higher education may make some families uncomfortable with the process of applying for admission.

Parents may support and encourage the educational endeavors of their children but may not have a clear understanding of what to expect during the college application process. Students with parents who did not attend college have no point of reference. Therefore, high school counselors and college admission officers, including my staff in Minority Applicant Services, must provide clear information regarding the application process, admissions, financial aid, housing, and campus life. Better information and personal attention will help prepare minority students to apply for college.

College admission should be a positive experience that starts early with good information and communication. Students of color have a lot to offer universities and must be a presence in this country's higher education system. Understanding the lack of experience that some minority students and their parents have is a step in the right direction toward providing clear and equal access to higher education.



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Freshman Admission Representatives 2006–07

Each of our freshman admission representatives is assigned to a specific geographic territory. It's where we go to recruit students, but the relationship goes far beyond that. We strive to get to know the high schools within our territories, the counselors who work in these schools, and to whatever extent possible, the students who apply to Wisconsin from the area.

This working model has proven very successful as we've established important ties and partnerships, as well as an understanding of the opportunities and issues that may exist for students in the schools we serve.

On the back of this page you will find a listing of our admission representatives and their given territories. You'll see some new names and those of old friends. A few things to note:

- (1) The state of Wisconsin is divided up among almost all of our counselors. To talk with the representative assigned to your specific school, please phone 608/262–3961 and our staff will connect you to the appropriate representative.
- (2) The states of Indiana and Ohio will be represented by a soon-to-be-hired new counselor. If you need assistance in the meantime, please phone 608/262–3961 and we'll be happy to help.
- (3) We have two counselors (Jane Yahr Shepard and Margo Ptacek) who work with international students and students who have an international educational background. Their contact information is included at the bottom of the listing. Please contact Jane and/or Margo as appropriate.

If you have a question about your admission representative or need more information, phone 608/262–3961 or send an e-mail to onwisconsin@admissions.wisc.edu. We're happy to connect you with the correct admission counselor and we look forward to our continued partnerships.

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A Newsletter From the Office of Admissions

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Request Admission Materials

Do you need copies of our *Viewbook*, *Preview Wisconsin*, *Freshman Admission Expectations*, or even a Wisconsin poster for your office? We're happy to send all the publications and applications you need. Just submit your request to Karen Mittelstadt, communications manager, via e-mail at kmittelstadt@admissions.wisc.edu. You can also send your students to our Web site, www.admissions.wisc.edu, where they can join our mailing list, request their own *Viewbook*, or even apply online.

Visit us online at www.admissions.wisc.edu