PROPOSED ADMISSION STANDARDS: A STUDENT SUCCESS PLAN

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON-DOWNTOWN

Our Goals:
✓ Retain more students
  • Raise first-year retention rates
  • Decrease the number of students who leave the University with large debt and with few or no credits.
✓ Graduate more students
  • Increase the number of First Generation Students who graduate each year
  • Raise UHD’s six-year graduation rate to the level of our peer universities
  • Increase the number of African-American and Hispanic students who graduate each year

Introduction – The Context for the Proposed Automatic Admission Standards

Since its founding, University of Houston-Downtown has been committed to providing open access and opportunity to working and part-time students. We are proud that UHD has one of the most diverse student bodies in the nation and ranks 37th among all colleges and universities in the country in graduating Hispanic and African-American students. UHD, our UH System Board of Regents and our Chancellor remain committed to maintaining our campus diversity and to ensuring that even more students earn their degrees. *UHD has been, and will remain, an opportunity university while retaining student diversity.*

A key element in UHD’s Strategic Plan is to increase student retention and graduation rates. UHD is developing individualized pathways to improve student success. Research studies show that students who participate in high-impact experiences graduate at higher rates and are significantly more likely to graduate in six years than those who do not participate in high-impact experiences. *UHD will provide our students with high-impact experiences, strong academic support, supplemental instruction, mandatory advising and other support strategies that improve their opportunities for success.*

UHD’s overall persistence rate (59%) and six-year graduation rate (12%) are among the lowest of all Texas four-year universities. To accomplish the goal of increasing persistence and graduation rates, especially among African-American and Hispanic students, UHD is incorporating a wide variety of support strategies, including the adoption of automatic admission standards in 2013.

We will use automatic admission standards to prescribe individualized pathways for our students as a way to increase student success rates. Our doors to access and opportunity will remain open. As we proceed with admission standards we are committed to retaining UHD’s diversity, increasing the
number of minority students we graduate, and expanding the support services and intervention strategies we provide for our students.

**The University Challenge**

There are several reasons that the University must move to admission standards. The relatively open access standards we are proposing stem from our desire to increase graduation rates, particularly for low-income minority students. But, there are other pressing concerns. UHD has seen its funding shrink over the years, requiring us to increase class size and reduce course offerings. While we will continue to offer developmental education courses, we must focus on offering courses for our majors and graduating our students.

In addition, changes to federal financial aid regulations now hold universities liable for students who default on federal loans. Many students currently enroll at UHD with skills that are insufficient for college-level work, and most of these students drop out. As a result, the high student loan default rate leaves UHD with a higher financial liability than our peers.

Despite our best efforts, about half of our freshmen, particularly those with the highest remediation needs, drop out before the end of the first year. Too many of these students leave UHD with few or no academic credits and high debt levels, particularly unpaid federal loan balances. UHD ranks third highest among our peers in loan default rates. We want to decrease the number of students who drop out and reduce the average debt loads for those that do drop out.

Consistent with its goal of increasing student success, UHD proposes that the following admission standards be adopted and implemented to admit the cohort of First Time in College (FTIC) students entering in the Fall of 2013:

**Proposed Automatic Admission Standards**

**UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON—DOWNTOWN**

**Request for UHS Board of Regents Approval:** Spring, 2012

**Proposed Implementation Date:** Fall, 2013 Entering Class

Top 25% of High School class

- Automatic Admission

26% to 50% of HS class

- Automatic Admission if:

  - SAT I ≥ 850
  - ACT ≥ 18
  - 2.5 GPA

51% and below HS class

- Individual Review*

(Including GED only or no HS rank)

* NOTE: No student will be automatically rejected from UHD. Rather, students will receive individualized review based on interviews, test scores and other assessments. Individual review consists

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of completing the Accuplacer and Non-cognitive Questionnaire assessments to determine college readiness and meeting with an admissions counselor and academic advisor to develop an individualized student success action plan. Students who require excessive remediation needs (which cannot be provided at UHD) will be referred to a local community college under UHD joint admissions and reverse transfer agreements.

**Individualized Pathways to Success**

In addition to SAT scores and Grade Point Average (GPA), UHD will use diagnostic tests to establish college readiness. Accuplacer, interviews and a non-cognitive qualitative assessment tool will be used to assess leadership and potential. These tools will be used by UHD to develop individualized plans based on student needs, skills and potential.

The new automatic admission standards will signal to middle school and high school students that they need to be better prepared to meet the rigor and requirements of college. The standards also will have a collateral effect of increasing the number of freshmen students who arrive at UHD prepared for college.

**Automatic Admission:** Students who have proven their ability to succeed academically by graduating in the top 25% of their high school class will be automatically admitted to UHD.

**Admission Based on Scores/GPA:** Students who have graduated in the second quartile of their high school class and who have scored well on the SAT or ACT and/or achieved above a 2.5 GPA will be automatically admitted to UHD. Students who graduated in the second quartile who did not score well on the standardized exams will meet with an admissions counselor and may be advised to take specialized courses to improve their skills.

**Individual Review:** Applicants who must undergo an individual review and those who do not meet automatic admission standards, particularly students with less than a 2.0 GPA, will be directed to complete the Accuplacer and Non-Cognitive Questionnaire (NCQ) exams and will meet with an admissions counselor. The scores on the two exams will be used to assess the academic readiness of the applicant. Based on these exams and on the meetings with their counselor, an applicant may be admitted without conditions or may be admitted conditionally. An applicant who is admitted conditionally will be required to successfully complete a student success course and specified developmental courses (reading, math and writing) during the first semester of enrollment. Students who are admitted conditionally may be limited initially to enrolling in 9 or fewer semester credit hours.

**Joint Admissions with the Gator Guarantee:**

Students who score poorly on the UHD placement test, who are at bottom quartile of their graduating class, who have very low GPAs and who require significant remedial work will be referred to a community college near their homes. They will be jointly admitted to UHD and to the community college with a **Gator Guarantee**, a student success action plan that details the courses that must be

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completed with a prescribed GPA to guarantee re-admission to UHD when the prerequisite conditions are met. Students who elect this program will be required to complete all developmental course work with passing scores as well as 24 hours of core courses.

A key element of this program is joint admission and reverse transfer agreements with the community colleges. Students who transfer from community colleges to UHD, particularly those who have completed their lower-division core courses, have the highest graduation rates at UHD. The Gator Guarantee Program is designed to increase student success, lower the cost of college and allow students to develop the necessary academic background to ensure completion of a degree. Returning students who earn a 2.5 GPA or higher at a community college will be offered scholarships upon returning to UHD.

**The UHD Commitment to Student Success**

The University of Houston-Downtown is committed to maintaining ethnic diversity and enrollment growth. We have developed mentoring and recruiting programs at area high schools and provide scholarship support for top students, especially those from underrepresented ethnic groups. New advising, mentoring, early alert and student engagement programs are being developed to ensure student success after a student enrolls at UHD. These new programs will be in place and operational when the new automatic admission standards are implemented. The UHD advising, mentoring and early alert processes are being modeled after the top advising and mentoring programs in the country.

Based on an analysis of Fall 2010 entering freshmen, 81% of our current freshman class would have been automatically admitted or admitted under the individual review process. The remaining 19% would be jointly admitted to UHD and a community college under the Gator Guarantee. Moreover, retention programs and intervention strategies will increase successful retention and graduation of at-risk students, particularly low-income minority students. We are confident that the implementation of automatic admission standards will maintain the current diversity of our campus.

Several new initiatives at UHD are designed to improve student success. The African-American Male Mentoring Program, Early Alert Program, required New Student Orientations, and a College Skills course are some examples of new programs that have been implemented recently. We project that retention strategies will increase retention and graduation rates for all of our students, but particularly for Hispanics and African-Americans.
## Admissions Comparisons

### Comparison of Admission Standards at Regional Universities near UHD

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Top 10%</th>
<th>Current UHD</th>
<th>Proposed UHD</th>
<th>UH-V All</th>
<th>SHSU All</th>
<th>SFA All</th>
<th>TAMUCC All</th>
<th>TAMU-G All</th>
<th>Lamar All</th>
<th>PVA&amp;M All</th>
<th>TSU All</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 2 Admits (11% to 25%)</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>850/17</td>
<td>850/17</td>
<td>900/19</td>
<td>920/19</td>
<td>850/18</td>
<td>820/17</td>
<td>820/17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Level 3 Admits (26% to 50%)</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>850/18</td>
<td>930/19</td>
<td>950/20</td>
<td>1000/21</td>
<td>1050/23</td>
<td>930/20</td>
<td>820/17</td>
<td>820/17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Level 4 Admits (51% to 75%)</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>Individual Review</td>
<td>1030/22</td>
<td>1100/24</td>
<td>1100/23</td>
<td>1180/26</td>
<td>1090/24</td>
<td>820/17</td>
<td>820/17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Level 5 Admits (≥ 76%)</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>Individual Review</td>
<td>1140/25</td>
<td>1200/27</td>
<td>1180/26</td>
<td>Individual Review</td>
<td>Individual Review</td>
<td>Individual Review</td>
<td>Individual Review</td>
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| FTICs Enrolled | 1,114 | 1,114 | n/a | 3,445 | 3,085 | 1,646 | 634 | 1,616 | 2,028 | 1,679 |
| Top 10% (N) | 18 | 18 | n/a | 475 | 431 | 194 | 53 | 163 | 85 | 94 |
| % Top 10 | 1.6 | 1.6 | n/a | 13.6 | 13.8 | 11.8 | 8.3 | 0.9 | 4.2 | 5.6 |
| Retention (%) | 59 | 59 | n/a | 72 | 64 | 65 | 50 | 65 | 71 | 61 |
| Graduation (4 Yr) | 3.1 | 3.1 | n/a | 29.7 | 25.6 | 23.5 | 26.9 | 10.6 | 11.5 | 3.1 |
| Graduation (6 Yr) | 17.2 | 17.2 | n/a | 54.1 | 56.5 | 53.4 | 58.9 | 34.9 | 35.1 | 11.8 |
| BACC Degrees | 2,359 | 2,359 | 515 | 3,242 | 1,874 | 1,335 | 262 | 1,239 | 879 | 817 |