

An Essential Guide to Graduate Admissions

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FOREWORD

Graduate admissions processes are among the key factors that shape the quality and character of a university in areas such as recruitment, retention, academic quality, and diversity. This publication is intended to identify and discuss good practices for graduate enrollment management. We have revised and updated the Council of Graduate Schools' 2005 *Essential Guide to Graduate Admissions* to reflect recent issues faced by graduate schools and graduate admissions professionals in this ever-changing graduate education landscape. Among these issues are the evolution from the traditionally narrow focus of "graduate admission" to the more comprehensive approach pursued through "graduate enrollment management," as well as the evaluation of credentials submitted by international applicants, the use of paid agents for international recruitment, and the generally accepted "do's and don'ts" of graduate affirmative action/diversity policies that have resulted from decisions of the U.S. Supreme Court. This publication is intended for graduate deans and other graduate school administrators, as well as faculty and graduate admissions professionals, who are involved in admissions decisions and who seek a broad view of the issues relating to graduate admissions, including federal and state laws and regulations, university-wide policies and procedures, and departmental guidelines.

Policies and practices of graduate admissions differ by institutional mission and structure. Some universities are highly selective, seeking the best and most talented among domestic and international applicants, while other universities strive to be widely accessible to their particular regional and/or state populations. Graduate admissions processes in some universities are highly centralized, with baseline standards established and technical aspects of the admissions process carried out by a central graduate school or administrative unit; in others, these processes are decentralized, with much more authority in all stages of the process residing in the colleges, schools, departments and programs. As with other CGS volumes, this publication recognizes the great variety of institutional cultures and structures in graduate education. At the same time, it seeks to identify common goals of successful graduate admissions processes. Regardless of mission and administrative structure, graduate admissions processes are most effective when they facilitate the matriculation of applicants who indicate promise of successfully completing their chosen programs, and when they match the applicants' knowledge, interests, and skills with the requirements and characteristics of those programs. Successful graduate admissions processes generally result in

higher retention rates; more satisfied graduate faculty, students, and alumni; and better quality graduate programs. We hope that this volume will contribute to the heightened understanding, enhancement and effectiveness of graduate admissions at your institution.

Debra W. Stewart
President
Council of Graduate Schools

I. INTRODUCTION

AN ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO GRADUATE ADMISSIONS

This document is intended to identify and discuss good practices for managing graduate admissions. Although a primary function of graduate admissions policies and procedures is to facilitate the matriculation of applicants who demonstrate promise of successfully completing their chosen programs, admission is also the first step – and an integral part – in effective enrollment management. Matching the knowledge, the interests, and the developed skills of the applicant with the requirements and characteristics of the graduate program results in higher retention rates; more satisfied graduate faculty, students, and alumni; and graduate programs that are more diverse, more effective, and of higher quality.

Graduate enrollment management requires sound organizational structures, effective policies, and good practices in both data and “customer relations” management. The admissions process is often the prospective student’s first real contact with the university, and the quality of the experience may well determine whether the student will attend and later complete the graduate program, and perhaps even how the graduate will relate to the university in future years. Increasingly, customer relations management for the applicant and student is viewed as a continual communications process that should be maintained throughout the student life cycle and beyond.

It is easy to take a passive role in the admissions arena and allow the composition of the admitted student cohort to be determined by accident or chance, rather than by design. Instead, graduate administrators and faculty should take an active approach to admissions, establishing in advance their program goals and priorities and the means by which they plan to realize them. Graduate admission policies that result from this proactive design will reflect these goals. The requirements for admission must then be articulated clearly to all relevant parties, including the applicants, admission committee members, and graduate admission administrators.

The question of where to begin is not an easy one. It is difficult to separate the recruiting function from that of admissions. The development and distribution of the catalog, promotional materials, and associated centrally-managed web sites are usually handled by an admissions office. Similarly, the

tracking of inquiries and ongoing communication with prospective students is a crucial aspect of recruitment and, handled properly, leads to a better match of admitted students to programs. Demographic studies of the inquiry pool are useful for planning, recruiting, and resource allocation. These activities will be considered part of the recruitment function and will not be discussed here. However, as the accuracy and effectiveness of these activities in meeting enrollment goals are inextricably linked to admissions, it is important that both deans and faculty be knowledgeable about and involved in the recruitment process.

Definitions

Throughout this policy document, the words “department” and “program” will be used interchangeably. “University” will be used to refer to any institution of higher learning. “School” indicates a unit of the university that offers degrees and is led by an academic dean; “graduate school” will refer specifically to the administrative unit or office that is responsible for central university graduate affairs. “Graduate admissions office” is used to describe the office with primary responsibility for admissions processes, whether this is accomplished within a single office for the entire university or at the school or department level. The title of “graduate dean” will refer to the chief academic officer responsible for graduate programs, whether he/she is in a graduate school (university-wide) or within an individual school. “Baseline” application materials or “baseline” admission standards will refer to those required for all graduate programs in the institution.

II. ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND THE MANAGEMENT OF GRADUATE ADMISSIONS

Centralized, Decentralized, and Collaborative Models

An effective and successful graduate admissions system requires appropriate admissions policies, procedures to implement these policies, and professional staff and efficient offices to carry out the admissions processing functions. The administration of this system includes oversight of both technical and policy-making functions. The technical aspects include collecting application materials, evaluating credentials, entering and maintaining admissions data, tracking applicants' progress through the system, and communicating with them throughout the process (e.g., informing them of missing documents, responding to questions, and sending notification of the admission decision). In the policy area, establishing and maintaining standards of admission, and determining and assessing admissions policies, are the primary concerns. Universities have devised a variety of ways to manage these graduate admissions functions, ranging from completely centralized to completely decentralized administrative structures, with many systems falling somewhere in between. Data collected by the National Association of Graduate Admissions Professionals in 2009 indicate that graduate admission processing is centralized at 62% of universities, is decentralized at 22% of universities, and involves a collaboration across levels (between the university and schools and/or schools and department) at the remaining 16% of institutions.¹

Centralization may occur at a university with a single graduate school, where only graduate applications are considered, or at the university level, where applications for both undergraduate and graduate students are processed. In fully centralized graduate college systems, policies governing procedures and baseline standards for all graduate programs are typically administered by the graduate college in conjunction with a university-wide council of faculty.

1 "Results of the NAGAP 2009 Survey on Organizational Structures," Perspectives, National Association of Graduate Admissions Professionals, Spring 2010, pg. 7.

The collection of application materials, the evaluation of credentials, a second level review of departmental admissions decisions, ongoing communication with applicants, the maintenance of accurate admissions records, and the assessment of admissions policies are all carried out centrally by the graduate college. A university-wide centralized admissions office, on the other hand, typically handles more, if not all, technical aspects of admissions, but does not make policy on baseline standards. Additionally, some technical functions (e.g., applicant evaluation) may be handled by the departments, schools, or the graduate school.

In a fully decentralized admissions system, each department or the school to which it belongs sets most of the policy governing procedures, establishes standards, and handles the technical aspects of admission as well.

A collaborative model melds these two systems. Although the specific distribution of responsibilities may vary from university to university depending on institutional size and complexity, components of graduate admissions that are more cost-effective when located within a single office (such as developing and maintaining online admissions processes and data entry) and/or that require specialized expertise that is difficult to provide in a decentralized environment (such as international credential evaluation) are generally centralized. Aspects of graduate admissions that require discipline-specific expertise (such as review and evaluation of applications) and personal contact with applicants are usually handled by the school or department.

Certainly, variations on these models are common. Since proper management of admission activities is critical to high quality graduate education, universities involved in graduate education should carefully consider which admission functions should be centralized and which departmentalized. Below are descriptions of the various admission functions with some advantages and disadvantages of centralized or decentralized control over each function.

Comparison of Models in the Processing of Admissions

Establishing Admissions Policies. Every institution needs a framework of university-wide policies governing graduate admission. In the centralized graduate school model, these policies are determined by the graduate school in consultation with various faculty councils. In a decentralized system (whether maintained in the school or the department), these might be determined by the chief academic officer of the school to which the departments belong, again in consultation with faculty councils. The advantage of the centralized graduate

school model is that a group of administrators and faculty with experience in graduate education make the policies governing graduate admissions. In consultation with colleagues in the departments, they decide what should be university-wide policy and what policy can be determined by the departments. In the decentralized system, the establishment of necessary university-wide policies may be deferred or, indeed, may not be specified at all. The absence of university-wide policies may result in a decline in the quality of the process and confusion among prospective students who may be interested in multiple programs that may cut across traditional academic boundaries.

Collecting Applications. The collection of applications involves monitoring the receipt of required online and paper credentials and timely notification to the prospective student of any missing documents. It is recommended that routine notices be sent to the applicant showing the status of the application, especially shortly before any decision deadlines. The applicant should also be informed when the application file is complete. At institutions where the application is deactivated if all credentials are not received within a set time period (typically one year), the student should receive a warning a month or two before the deactivation deadline. Allowing applicants to confirm receipt of documents, check the status of their application, and access admissions decisions through a secure online enrollment management system greatly enhances this process.

Certain aspects of these functions are best handled centrally. Development and maintenance of an online admissions management system and clerical and data-entry functions can be performed more efficiently and effectively with full-time, professional staff members trained for and dedicated to these responsibilities. Admissions processing is not an ad hoc or additional responsibility as it may be at the department level. Personnel who are involved full-time in the admissions process can provide the focus and expertise required to meet the needs both of students applying for admission and faculty considering applications. Having a central office to which all materials are sent can often be less confusing to applicants, particularly those interested in multiple programs.

When these processes are centralized within a graduate school rather than combined with undergraduate admissions in a university-wide office, more control is achieved over the entire admissions process. The graduate school often can answer applicants' questions about the institutional requirements and policies and about its array of academic programs more knowledgeably than a centralized university-wide office. Further, graduate applications do not compete for attention with other deadlines (freshman, transfer, or professional applications).

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Successful matriculation of applicants, particularly of the most highly qualified students, depends upon timely responses and appropriately targeted communications. Unless care is taken, a centralized admissions system can fall behind in processing applications at times of peak activity, leading to frustration on the part of faculty and applicants. Holding documents until a file is completed can hinder information flow. These problems may be overcome when applicant data and document tracking is maintained in a shared database that allows faculty to be aware of applications in process and begin a preliminary review of materials before the dossier is complete. Allowing online access for applicants to check the status of their application and the receipt of documents also facilitates a more satisfying admissions experience. The graduate dean should set goals for the timely processing of applications and, with input from departments and admissions staff, periodically examine the efficiency of the admissions process.

The greatest advantage of involving schools and departments in admissions processing is the sensitivity that can be practiced in dealing directly with the applicants. Inappropriate applications can be returned quickly to the students, saving considerable time and effort in clerical work, and permitting the applicants time to apply elsewhere or seek other career paths. Students who apply directly to the department can be contacted immediately by telephone, text message, or email and, where feasible, invited to visit the department. However, it is important to establish a university-wide view of the admissions process and to require departments to adhere to university standards. This is particularly true in terms of responding in a timely fashion, especially if a department is understaffed. Departments where the graduate program is a central focus tend to perform this function better than programs in which undergraduate education dominates. However, issues of staff turnover and training at the department level can still be problematic, resulting in loss of organizational memory and administrative inconsistencies.

Evaluating Credentials. Evaluation of credentials requires the accurate computation of grade-point averages as required by the individual programs (overall undergraduate GPA, major GPA, GPA for the last 60 credit hours earned, etc.), the evaluation of international transcripts, and monitoring for proof of completion of prerequisite courses and entry-level degree(s). While GPA computation and the evaluation of course and credential prerequisites can be performed centrally or at the department level, evaluation of international credentials generally requires a specially trained staff and extensive (and often expensive) reference materials. Identifying potentially fraudulent documents also requires a breadth of exposure to documents that is difficult to achieve at

the department level. As noted below under Establishing Admissions Policies - Official transcripts, some schools utilize the services of an external educational credential service, in particular for the review of international records. More qualitative components of the application (such as letters of recommendation and interviews) are normally evaluated by the department, together with supplemental application material such as resumes, writing samples, and portfolios.

Experienced graduate school personnel understand the unique nature of the graduate admissions process, wherein faculty members and departmental committees have the major voice in determining which applicants should be accepted. Thus, graduate school personnel can more suitably prepare the dossier that will be sent to the department and attempt to match the applicant to the program best suited to his or her interests and abilities. High priority files can be marked so expedited action will be taken by the department.

Selecting Applicants for Admission. The faculty of the department recommends applicants for admission. Generally, this is done by the program director or, preferably, by a departmental committee, using campus-wide and program-specific standards. In some programs, students must take significant amounts of coursework in other disciplines, in addition to courses in the specific field of study. In these cases, it may be wise to involve individuals from those disciplines in the review of credentials to ensure that the applicant has the necessary background to successfully complete the coursework in those fields. The graduate school should provide a second level of review of all admissions decisions, not only of those that deviate from established policy. Even the rejected applications should be carefully reviewed by the graduate office to ensure equitable and responsible admissions decisions across the program, school, and university.

The graduate school has the authority to enforce standards or, in exceptional cases, to waive requirements. Policies to create and maintain a diverse graduate student population are best monitored by the centralized graduate office. Even well-intentioned faculty in departments may lack the skills and experience required to actively seek qualified students from underrepresented populations, based on ethnicity, gender, social/economic background, or geographic location.

Notifying Applicants of Admissions Decisions. Individual faculty members or department chairs should never make offers of admission, either verbally or in writing, unless authorized to do so by the graduate college or school. Notification of an admission decision should come from an administrator designated as the official source of this information in the graduate college or

an individual school. This person is usually the dean or his/her designee.

Admissions decisions should never be provided verbally, but must be conveyed in writing. For ease and speed of communication, notification that a decision has been made can be sent via e-mail, and admissions decisions can be posted online, provided access is password-protected to prevent viewing by anyone other than the applicant. Online posted decision letters should be available to the applicant as printable documents, and can eliminate the need for a paper letter.

Many institutions use sophisticated technology, such as Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems, to communicate with prospects and admitted students. These systems often have modules to enable efficient and timely delivery messages from the Office of Admission.

Maintaining Accurate Admissions Records. To respond to federal and institutional requests for information and to formulate strategic plans for graduate programs, it is necessary to collect, analyze, and present data on the numbers and characteristics of applicants. Information on the rates of attrition from applications to acceptances, to enrollments, and to degree completions should be kept for each program and augmented yearly to provide a continuing record. Distribution of the reports should include admissions policy-making bodies as well as admissions committee members.

Data should be maintained centrally wherever possible, but reviewed and evaluated by the faculty of the program to ensure accuracy. Consistent data input for all programs demands central responsibility for computer design and maintenance and data entry. Without such central control, all graduate programs may not have adequate or comparable computer access. Central data entry facilitates accurate statistics on such items as gender, age, ethnicity, programmatic interest, etc. This centralized database can be used to improve recruitment, to help with planning of future enrollments, and to monitor time-to-degree. In their major study on factors contributing to high attrition and long time-to-degree in graduate programs, Bowen and Rudenstine² state that “the desirability of centralized control over graduate school records is one indisputable lesson of this entire project.”

Assessing Admissions Policies. Monitoring the outcomes of admissions policies in terms of student numbers, demographic profile of the student body, academic success, student satisfaction, and job placement should be a continuing process. It is very difficult to carry out the review of admissions actions and their impact on programs in the absence of a centralized review by the graduate

2 William G. Bowen and Neil L. Rudenstine, In *Pursuit of the PhD*, Princeton University Press, 1992, p.295.

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school. While the department should conduct annual self-assessments of its admissions practices, the success of the graduate endeavor as a whole requires similar evaluation by a neutral party, such as the graduate dean.

III. ESTABLISHING ADMISSIONS POLICIES

Philosophy, Goals, and Objectives of the Institution and Department

To be effective, admissions policies must be consistent with the philosophy of the institution. They must be realistic, readily understood, and have widespread support. The degree of selectivity should be influenced by the history, tradition, and academic values of the institution. Policies for admitting international, underrepresented, minority, non-traditional, physically impaired, or learning disabled students must be firmly grounded in an institutional commitment to providing resources to ensure that these students have the opportunity to pursue a graduate education and fulfill degree requirements. Graduate admissions policies follow a Federalist model: the graduate school defines the baseline academic admissions standards and may set goals for the desired general population mix of the graduate student body, while the individual schools and departments may refine and strengthen these requirements to assure the entry of students who demonstrate the promise of completing their chosen educational programs successfully, and, indeed, with distinction. In all instances, admissions policies must ensure that decisions are based on a holistic review of the credentials and background presented by each applicant.

At the department level, special conditions may exist which help mold the admissions policy of that unit. Limited departmental resources, limited employment opportunities for graduates, or undergraduate teaching needs may dictate enrollment goals. When setting targeted enrollment numbers, however, the program must be cautious that it is doing so in the students' best interest. Too large or too small a class may not be conducive to educational enrichment. In some programs, other non-academic factors may have major impacts on the probability of success in those fields of study.³ Prior employment history is quite relevant in business or public administration and a number of other professional fields of study, as are personality characteristics and interpersonal skills in fields such as counseling or social work.

³ For further discussion of institutional factors, see the CGS publication *Ph.D. Completion and Attrition: Policies and Practices to Promote Student Success*, 2010, and *Ph.D. Completion and Attrition*, 2004.

Once baseline performance measures for admissions have been established, it is prudent that the university legal counsel review them to assure compliance with all applicable laws and regulations affecting the admissions process.

Legal Issues

Graduate admissions personnel should keep abreast of the laws, regulations, and legal issues affecting admissions.⁴ Since 1960, a growing body of case law and legislative protections has emerged dealing with the rights of students in the admissions process. Legal issues relevant to admissions involve the criteria upon which admissions decisions are made and the procedures by which admissions criteria are enacted. These criteria and procedures should be well documented and published in institutional announcements so both the prospective student and admissions committees are aware of the measures for admission. Courts in many states have concluded that such documents constitute a legal contract between the student and the institution. Providing a complete description of the factors that can influence an admissions decision will have the added benefit of allowing applicants to provide institutions with complete, relevant information from which the faculty can make better-informed, more purposeful decisions.

This publication is not intended to include a definitive or exhaustive statement on legal issues affecting graduate admissions.⁵ It is not a substitute for professional advice from the university's legal counsel, and indeed, such advice should be sought concerning the appropriateness of admissions requirements, application forms, and affirmative action programs. The text that follows is intended to heighten the awareness of those persons involved in the admissions process regarding potential legal problems.

Offers of Admission. Because faculty involvement in the review of applicant credentials is essential to the graduate admissions process, the potential exists for verbal offers of admission or acceptance letters to emanate from departmental offices or individual faculty. To address this potential problem, a clearly defined administrative person (often the graduate dean)

4 Both the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (www.AACRAO.org) and the National Association of College and University Attorneys (www.NACUA.org) offer publications on a wide variety of legal topics relating to university admissions.

5 For a more extensive discussion of legal issues surrounding graduate admissions, see the 2006 revision of the CGS publication, *Selected Legal Issues Relating to Due Process and Liability in Higher Education - A Policy Statement* (1st printing, 1994).

should be assigned the sole authority to offer admission to applicants, and applicants should be advised that only a written communication from that person is an official offer of admission. All personnel should be cognizant of who has the legal authority to admit students. To underscore the importance of this point, it may be helpful to remind unauthorized personnel that litigation defense costs and damage awards are not covered by an institution's insurance policies when an employee acts outside the scope of his or her official authority.

Generally, the courts will not interfere in admissions standards decisions made by universities, provided they are reasonable, well publicized, and not in violation of applicable federal or state law. This deference to the university's autonomy is based on the theory that in academic matters the expertise of educators is superior to the judgment of the courts. Indeed, in the 1957 case *Sweezy v. New Hampshire*, the United States Supreme Court identified the ability of universities to select their students free from undue governmental influence as one of four fundamental components of academic freedom. However, certain aspects of the admissions process are subject to three general constraints:

- (1) the selection process must not be arbitrary or capricious;
- (2) the institution may be bound, under a contract theory, to adhere to its published admissions standards and to honor its admissions decisions;
- and (3) the institution may not have admissions policies that unjustifiably discriminate on the basis of characteristics such as race, sex, disability, age, residence or citizenship.⁶

Affirmative Action/Diversity Recruitment. Affirmative action/diversity recruitment can take many forms, from targeted outreach and recruitment efforts, to using race as a plus factor in admissions decision-making, to targeted scholarship and grant programs. Most of the litigation surrounding affirmative action has focused on the second type of affirmative action—giving members of selected minority groups a preference in the admissions process—and several cases have made their way to the U.S. Supreme Court in recent decades. Although the Supreme Court has not sought to establish a single, legally viable method of pursuing this type of affirmative action, the Court's decisions about some specific policies and practices that have come before it enable us to extract some general principles and cautions.

In reviewing an affirmative action program, whether at a public or private institution, courts engage in a two-part analysis. First, they determine whether

6 William A. Kaplan and Barbara A. Lee, *The Law of Higher Education*, 4th ed., Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2006, p.753.

the affirmative action program serves a “compelling” purpose. Second, they examine the mechanics of the program to determine whether it is “narrowly tailored” to meet that purpose.

To date, universities have advanced many purposes for affirmative action, but the Supreme Court has found only two to be sufficiently compelling to overcome the Constitutional and statutory prohibitions against discrimination on the basis of race. Those two purposes are 1) remedying the present effects of an institution’s own prior discrimination, and 2) achieving the educational benefits that flow from racial and ethnic diversity in the classroom. Other purposes, such as training a diverse leadership class for a state, training professionals who will work in underserved communities, and overcoming general, societal discrimination, have been found wanting.

The most recent higher-education affirmative-action cases to come before the Supreme Court involve both the undergraduate and law school admissions processes at the University of Michigan.⁷ In those cases, the Court found Michigan’s stated purpose (achieving classroom diversity) to be compelling, but struck down the undergraduate process while upholding that of the law school. Those two decisions, especially when combined with earlier Supreme Court precedent, provide some guidance about the second prong of the analysis – whether the process is “narrowly tailored” to achieve its goal. In a very general way, this “narrow tailoring” analysis can be described as an attempt to balance the interests of the institution and minority applicants with the rights of non-minority applicants. Some clearly impermissible methods are: 1) quotas, or numerical goals that are implemented in such a way that they effectively are quotas; 2) having separate review tracks for different applicant populations; 3) using race or ethnicity as the sole criterion for minority applicants; 4) having different admissions requirements for members of different racial or ethnic groups; and 5) within an admissions point system, automatically assigning a specific number of points to members of certain racial or ethnic groups.

Helpfully, these cases also provide some guidance about what the Supreme Court considers to be permissible methods of practicing affirmative action. Affirmative action programs must be deemed necessary to achieve the institution’s goals, i.e., the institution must examine alternatives to affirmative action to determine whether methods other than race-consciousness are effective, using those methods that are effective. Institutions should reevaluate their affirmative action programs periodically to determine their effectiveness,

⁷ In February 2012, the U.S. Supreme Court agreed to hear another affirmative action admissions case (*Fisher v. University of Texas*), but the trial is scheduled to take place after this publication went to press.

to determine whether they are still necessary, and to make refinements when needed. Race or ethnicity should be one of many factors that an institution considers when selecting among its applicants, and all applicants should be reviewed using a unitary process that evaluates each applicant on all of the criteria the institution deems important. Also, it is clear that programs that define eligibility on the basis of race are more legally suspect than programs that are open to all but may give a preference to members of certain minority groups.

The Court has endorsed a “holistic” approach to admissions decision-making among those institutions that practice affirmative action. Hallmarks of this approach are: clearly established admissions criteria and goals that are consistent with the institution’s mission; and a full-file review for each applicant, one that considers all of the institution’s admissions criteria. Also, institutions should consider forms of diversity beyond racial and ethnic diversity, and carefully examine each file for evidence of a potential contribution to the rich exchange of ideas and viewpoints that should characterize a diverse student body. Graduate schools may seek diversity within incoming classes on the wide range of factors that contribute to students’ background experiences and their development of particular points of view. For example, schools may strive to enroll students from different political viewpoints, geographic origins (urban/rural, domestic/ international), religious affiliation, socio-economic status, undergraduate institutions attended, work and volunteer experience, and many other factors.

The law concerning affirmative action (both in admissions and in related activities) is still developing, and changes in the law can occur rather quickly. When developing or refining any type of affirmative action program, it is essential to involve university counsel.

Application Forms. When designing an application form, several legal factors must be taken into consideration. Various federal statutes and regulations require universities to include some specific kinds of information, and prohibit them from asking applicants certain questions or place conditions on the circumstances under which requests for some information may be made. Universities are required to include a statement of nondiscrimination on the basis of race and sex on all literature dealing with admissions. Federal law also requires universities to include, somewhere in their general information for applicants, contact information for the office that provides services to students with disabilities and for the office that maintains campus crime statistics.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 prohibit pre-admission inquiries about disabilities,

although such information may be asked after admission, on a voluntary basis. The application form cannot inquire about marital status nor can it ask the applicant to give her maiden name. Public institutions that ask an applicant to provide his or her Social Security number (SSN) must indicate that providing the number is voluntary *and* provide enough information about how the number will be used that an applicant can make an informed decision about whether to supply it. Several states have prohibited colleges and universities from using the SSN as the student ID number or otherwise publishing it. Therefore, universities all across the country, even in states without such a prohibition, will receive transcripts and letters of recommendations on behalf of applicants that do not bear a Social Security number. In addition, many states have laws governing the handling and storage of the SSN (e.g., in encrypted format with partial-number displays on screens and documents) that require the attention of information technology personnel. An emerging best practice in this area is to ask the applicant for his or her undergraduate student ID number or the GRE (or other testing program's) account number rather than the Social Security number.⁸

Questions about race and ethnicity are permissible under federal law, but should be accompanied by a statement indicating that responses are voluntary. In addition to the usual check-boxes, questions regarding race and ethnicity should include an “other” category or an open-ended opportunity for an applicant to describe him or herself. Many universities have chosen to mirror the Department of Education’s race and ethnicity reporting format on their applications. This is a convenient, but not a required, format for collecting this information. Indeed, many universities find that using more refined categories is helpful to their programmatic goals. Public institutions in states where affirmative action is not permissible may, however, best be served by not including a question about race or ethnicity on the application form.

Although this section has described limitations on including certain kinds of questions on an application form, it is important to remember that questions seeking the same kinds of information during an in-person interview also carry similar restrictions. Understanding these limitations and restrictions is particularly relevant to graduate admissions personnel and faculty decision-makers, as interviews often play a key role in the graduate admissions process.

Student Behavior: A developing legal issue in the admissions arena relates to the liability of the institution for acts of its students. In 1986, a public

⁸ Note that the Federal government requires applicants for Federal financial aid to provide their SSN on the application for financial aid. As a result, many programs have chosen to have separate admissions and financial aid applications.

institution was found liable for admitting as a student an ex-felon who engaged in additional problematic behavior as a student. The university was not aware of the student's extensive criminal record.

Many states do not have law relating specifically to the admission of candidates with prior criminal histories. As a result, this issue is a matter of policy for institutions in such states. Different institutions have and will continue to adopt different policies and practices. Some may adopt a blanket prohibition on the enrollment of students with certain kinds of histories, while others will adopt a policy of case-by-case review and determination. As with all matters covered in this Legal Issues section, policies and practices should be adopted or modified in consultation with university counsel.

For programs that include a required externship or clinical experience, or that typically lead to licensure or external certification, there will be additional considerations. In the former case, a program may choose to deny admission to applicants who cannot successfully complete the academic program because they will be ineligible to participate in required externship or clinical components. In the latter case, it may be legally more problematic for a program to deny admission on the basis of a post-degree, external licensing requirement. In both cases, universities best serve candidates by making any programmatic or licensure requirements known to all applicants, so that they can make informed decisions about whether to seek admission.

It is generally permissible for an institution to make pre-admission inquiries about prior criminal records although some state statutes prohibit discriminating against persons convicted of criminal offenses. In formulating criteria for rejecting applicants with criminal records, consideration should be given to the nature of the criminal activity and its relationship to a campus environment, the elapsed time since the crime was committed, and the rehabilitation efforts of the applicant. Because state law governs inquiries about prior criminal behavior, and the weight a university may attach to the information it receives, it is particularly important to work with university counsel in drafting application questions and admissions policies in this area.

The Buckley Amendment/FERPA. The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA), popularly known as the Buckley Amendment, generally provides access rights of enrolled students to their admissions records, except for confidential recommendations for which a valid waiver to the right of access has been signed by the student. Admitted students have the right to see comments written about them by admissions officers, whether these notes are kept separate from the student's permanent record or not. Some universities routinely destroy reports prepared by their admissions offices

once students are admitted, which is permissible as long as the student had not requested access to this material before it was destroyed.⁹ Other institutions choose to keep admissions comments for assessment purposes; to check if their prediction about a student's potential matched his or her actual performance.

The FERPA provisions do not apply to unsuccessful applicants, to accepted applicants who do not enroll, or to applicants applying to a different program at an institution they have already attended. Nevertheless, it is possible that state law or an institution's own privacy and confidentiality policies provide some privacy protections for information about applicants who are denied admission or who do not enroll. It is important, therefore, to understand the promise of confidentiality an institution is making to its applicants, and to train all personnel who have access to applicant information about its implementation.

Since the Buckley Amendment does not govern records of a person who has not attended an institution, many institutions choose to destroy, after a designated period of time (e.g., three years), application files of students who were not accepted or who did not attend. Keeping the applicant's record for this period of time is useful in case of a complaint by a disappointed applicant or in case of a review by an outside agency. Once again, decisions about which information to retain, and how long to retain it, are best made in consultation with university counsel.

Fraudulent Applications. If a student submits a fraudulent application, he or she may have the offer of admission rescinded or, if already in attendance, be subject to dismissal from the university. It is helpful to explain these consequences to candidates at the application stage. If the student has not yet enrolled, an opportunity to rebut the decision in writing constitutes sufficient action to satisfy due process requirements. At public institutions, if the student has commenced studies, he or she is entitled to a formal written notice of the charges, an opportunity to rebut the charges, an opportunity to retain the services of counsel at any hearing, confront the accusers, present evidence on his or her behalf, and receive a record of the hearing which took place before an unbiased disciplinary board. Private institutions do not have to follow due process procedures in dismissing students with fraudulent applications; however, they must follow their own published procedures in such actions, and those procedures must provide the applicant with "fundamental fairness," which has come to mean, in essence, notice of the matter and an opportunity to present information or arguments on his or her own behalf.

Although one should be aware of potential legal problems, fear of a

9 *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, "Students Have Right to See Comments of Admissions Officers, Education Department Rules," Volume XXXVIII, Number 30, April 1, 1992, p. A1.

lawsuit should never deter anyone from fulfilling the role of his or her office. As non-lawyers, we are more likely to get into legal difficulties if we try to make our decisions on a legal rather than an academic basis. The courts will generally uphold decisions made with good academic judgment and an earnest effort to act within the law.

Application Requirements and Selection Standards

Baseline admissions standards (those applicable to all degree applicants) are generally set in one of two ways, depending on the administrative organization of the institution. Where there is a central graduate unit, standards are set by a council of faculty representative of all graduate degrees and programs. In decentralized systems, specific administrative entities such as a College of Art and Sciences or a School of Education establish faculty councils that set the standards. In either case, departments may require additional material or set more stringent standards. These standards will determine what credentials will be required from the applicant.

Generally the graduate administrative unit sets a minimum overall undergraduate grade-point index which the student should have earned to be considered for admission. This minimum usually ranges between 2.7 and 3.0 on a 4.0 scale. Departments may set higher minimum standards. Departments may also stipulate the minimum grade-point averages to be achieved in the desired major or during the last year or two of undergraduate study. When calculating the grade-point average, all previous transcripts should be evaluated. Admissions committees should pay attention to when the GPA was achieved, since grading standards generally have become less rigorous over time. In cases where exceptional circumstances incline faculty to want to admit a student with a grade-point average below the standards set, the graduate dean or the officer responsible for graduate education should have the authority to make the final decision.

Required Application Material. Regardless of what standards are set by individual departments, all applications to graduate programs should include, at a minimum, the following elements:

1. An application form.
2. Official transcripts of all previous academic work¹⁰ (with certified

10 Some institutions accept unofficial transcripts or last 60 hours transcripts for screening or evaluation purposes. Students who are accepted must submit official transcripts at a later date. See *Official Transcripts and Evaluating an Applicant with an Incomplete Dossier*, below, for further discussion.

translations, for non-English transcripts) from which undergraduate grade-point averages can be computed.

3. Letters of recommendation.
4. Proof of English competency for international students for whom English is not the first language.

The application form. There are almost as many different versions of application forms as there are graduate institutions. Indeed, there may be different forms in use within a given institution. A plethora of application styles is not ideal for either the university, which requires a uniform database for report generation and institutional research and planning, or for the student who may apply to two or more programs within the same school. A simple, common application form for all graduate programs should be developed, requesting student identification data, demographic data (basically for reporting purposes and institutional research), and information to assist in the admission decision. Individual departments can then supplement this common form with program specific requirements.

Biographical data should include the student's name and other names or alternative spellings that may appear on transcripts or test score reports, permanent and temporary addresses and telephone numbers (with a date indicating when the temporary address will no longer be valid), Social Security number (with the caveats noted in the "Application Forms" section above), date and place of birth, citizenship, visa information (a checklist of possible visa types is preferable to a blank space), and native language.

Demographic data collection can create difficulties since applicants may believe their responses may count against them in the admissions process. Yet federal, state, and institutional report requirements mandate the collection of ethnic, sex, age, and disability information. As mentioned in the section above on legal issues, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 prohibits pre-admission inquiries about disabilities (unless an institution is taking remedial action to correct effects of past discrimination), so this information cannot be obtained from an admissions application. Race and ethnicity data may be obtained prior to admission, but must be provided on a voluntary basis.

When requesting demographic information from applicants, categories should be clearly defined and options should include all categories of relevant interest to the institution. Many institutions pattern their demographic questions on US Census Bureau categories. Of particular significance is a 2010 Census Bureau brief¹¹, which noted "federal standards mandate that race and Hispanic

11 Karen R. Humes, Nicholas A. Jones, and Roberto R. Ramirez, "Overview of Race and Hispanic Origin: 2010." *2010 Census Briefs*. C2010BR-02. March 2011.

origin (ethnicity) are separate and distinct concepts and that when collecting these data via self-identification, two different questions must be used.” (See Appendix B, section II.c, for sample.)

Some institutions include a disclaimer with the ethnicity question, saying data will be used only for reporting purposes. However, if race (or sex) is being used in the admissions process to identify special groups as part of an affirmative action or diversity initiative, it is important that such a disclaimer be omitted. A statement such as the following may be appropriate: “The purpose of this inquiry is to assess the effectiveness of the University’s recruitment efforts and to facilitate selection of a diverse student body. Since the University does not discriminate on the basis of race or ethnic origin, the answer to this question or the omission of an answer will not influence the University’s decision on admission.”

As stated in the legal issues section above, all application materials must contain a non-discrimination statement. For example, the application might state: “(Name of University) does not discriminate on the basis of race, creed, national origin, sexual orientation, age, sex, disability, or marital or veteran status in any of its policies, procedures, programs, or practices. Any grievances pertaining to discrimination should be directed to (Name of appropriate person).”

If the institution has clearly identified how it will utilize the information, questions may be asked pertaining to the criminal record of the applicant (see legal section above) or previous academic ineligibility at any college or university.

Academic data should include a list of all institutions previously attended. Many application forms request dates and scores for one or more assessment tests such as the GRE, GMAT, MAT, and/or TOEFL, IELTS, or PTEA. Since these student-reported scores should not be accepted for admission purposes, the application form should tell the student also to request official scores be sent directly from the testing company. In many instances the university will be able to obtain these scores electronically directly from the testing company if the student has authorized their release.

Program related data include name(s) of program(s) to which the student is applying and area of specialization (if applicable), graduate degree objective, full- or part-time status, and date of anticipated enrollment. For state institutions, legal residency must be ascertained. Additional questions, such as whether the applicant wishes to be considered for financial aid or whether the applicant has ever applied to (or attended) the institution before might be included on the general form or as part of a linked student support application.

Program-specific questions including those related to employment history, courses in progress, publications, research experience, honors or awards, etc., can be asked as part of the personal statement, if the department desires this information. The statement also may include questions needed to determine eligibility for diversity consideration. Material requested should be necessary for the consistent evaluation of the applicant and not on a “nice to know” basis.

Official transcripts. It must be stressed that *official* transcripts from all institutions attended need to be submitted. Since the possibility of fraudulent records always exists, when official transcripts are placed in a sealed envelope and given to the student either to be hand delivered or placed in an application packet envelope, documents must be carefully reviewed, and the institution contacted if there is any question of their accuracy or authenticity. Including a “Request for Transcript” form with application materials can help streamline and clarify the process. (See Appendix B, section III.b, for sample.)

For evaluation purposes only, some universities accept unofficial copies of the student’s transcript or transcripts, received via fax or email as a PDF attachment. Some university registrars now provide official digital transcript services. When unofficial review transcripts are permitted, if the student is accepted it should be a provisional (or tentative) acceptance, pending receipt within a specific time frame of official copies of all transcripts.

Since a baccalaureate degree from a regionally accredited institution is generally a prerequisite for admission to any graduate program, it is important to ascertain that such a degree has indeed been earned. When an applicant is admitted before completing the bachelor’s degree, some sort of mechanism needs to be in place to ensure that the degree has been awarded before the student may enroll in graduate classes. At a minimum, the student should be admitted conditionally pending submission of an official transcript showing the awarding of the degree. A certified document from the student’s institution stating that all requirements for the bachelor’s degree have been satisfied may be sufficient to permit matriculation, but the student still must submit an official transcript when it becomes available.

The question of accreditation of an institution can be confusing to both the applicant and the admissions office. The American Council on Education publishes a booklet, *Accredited Institutions of Postsecondary Education*, which lists all regionally accredited institutions. Students sometimes confuse regional accreditation with professional accreditation. Regional accreditation is carried out by one of the six regional accrediting organizations and applies to the institution. Specialized or programmatic accreditation is carried out by

national organizations that represent a professional or specialized discipline, and applies to specific programs such as pharmacy, law, etc. The pertinent consideration with respect to graduate admission is regional accreditation.

International transcripts that are not in English should be accompanied by certified English translations. The application instructions should stipulate that a literal, not interpretive, translation is required. Resources (reference materials and trained evaluators) must be available to provide an adequate review of foreign transcripts since these can pose problems with respect to degree equivalence, grading systems, and quality of the institution. Generally, a minimum of sixteen years of schooling and an earned degree equivalent to an American bachelor's degree is required of all applicants. On occasion, graduates of three-year postsecondary programs in prestigious universities may be well qualified. In this case, admissions offices need to work closely with departmental admissions committees to identify those students who demonstrate the ability to successfully complete the graduate program. Three-year Bologna degrees deemed equivalent to an American bachelor's degree increasingly are accepted on a routine basis by U.S. universities.

A variety of resources are available to assist in evaluating international credentials. A number of valuable materials are available from NAFSA, the Association of International Educators. The International Education Series, published by AACRAO, provides descriptions of the educational systems of a number of countries, with recommendations for placement. Additionally, schools often utilize the services of an external educational credential evaluation service. The National Association of Credential Evaluation Services (NACES, www.naces.org) is an association of private foreign educational credential evaluation services.

In rare instances, a student is unable to obtain a copy of his/her transcript. Institutional records may have been destroyed by fire, flood, or another natural disaster. In countries where there has been political upheaval, documents may have been destroyed or simply may not be obtainable. When institutions close, all records are usually transferred to another site such as a state education department (in the case of domestic institutions) or a national ministry of education (in the case of foreign credentials). However, students may not be able to trace the new location of their records. An admissions officer should be very skeptical about a student's claim that a transcript is not available. On the other hand, if follow-up checks confirm that the official transcript is not available, an institution should consider accepting unofficial student copies of transcripts if available and/or a notarized or otherwise certified statement from the student of the courses taken and grades received. In this case, other

application credentials would be given more weight in the application process, and a provisional acceptance may be appropriate to provide the student an opportunity to verify his or her abilities.

Occasionally, a person who does not have a bachelor's degree and is not enrolled in an undergraduate degree program may apply to graduate school. For domestic students, this sometimes occurs when an older applicant with extensive practical experience in a field desires to further his or her academic knowledge of the subject. On the international level, students seeking political or social asylum who may not have completed all coursework for the degree may request to make up the deficiencies prior to or concurrent with their graduate work. It is extremely important that the institution have a clear view of the policy it wishes to follow in these cases. Whether for a domestic or an international student, deviation from the published norm of admissions requirements must be grounded in sound educational principles and rooted in the mission of the institution, and admission of such students should occur in only extremely unusual circumstances.

Letters of recommendation. Most institutions require two or three letters of recommendation, although this may vary by program. Applicants should be given some general guidance by the institution (and in particular by the department) regarding what is expected in these letters. There should be at least one letter required from someone who is familiar with the applicant's previous academic work, and in general, letters from former professors are preferred, especially those representing the applicant's major field. However, many professional degree programs may require letters from employers or other professionals in the field. Students should be advised that letters from prominent individuals or from family or friends have little or no impact if these persons cannot properly and objectively evaluate the applicant's ability to do graduate work. However, letters which can describe the applicant's background experiences, motivation, or capacity to succeed should be included. These could come from employers or other people familiar with the strengths of the student.

The form for the letter of recommendation should be defined by or in consultation with the department. The combination of an open-ended letter with and a checklist of specific attributes helps to assure the collection of information useful to the department. Institutions with online application processes generally now also use online recommendation forms. Some programs or institutions create or provide a structured tool to facilitate comparisons. Such tools may be employed in addition to or in place of traditional letters of recommendation.

Since the effectiveness of a letter of recommendation often hinges

upon the writing style of the recommender, a checklist also makes it easier to compare letters of recommendation. Forms for letters of reference should include statements on them permitting the applicant to waive the right to see the letter of reference.

Those submitting recommendation letters should be given specific advice on what kind of information to include in the open-ended letter relative to the requirements of the field. An indication of how long the writer has known the applicant and in what capacity is important information. Also, the writer should be advised that no reference should be made either directly or indirectly to the applicant's disability, if applicable. Letters of recommendation are not a common part of the admissions process at foreign institutions, so more precise descriptions of what is expected will increase the likelihood of receiving satisfactory letters from individuals overseas. Examples of letter of recommendation forms are included in Appendix B, section IV.

If the admissions committee is not familiar with the recommender or is not sure of the credibility of the recommender, a call to that person might be helpful. Any ambiguities or contradictions of other supporting documents could also be clarified in this way. A letter from a university thanking the recommender may encourage the person to direct future students to that institution and, additionally, can help to ensure that the person acknowledged wrote the letter.

Proof of English competency. All students for whom English is not the first language must provide proof of English proficiency. Possible exceptions may be made for applicants who have completed a degree at an accredited institution in an English-speaking country where English was the language of instruction. Institutions offering courses in English for foreign students can modify academic course loads to allow for additional concurrent language training, and thus may be able to consider applicants with a lower range of scores on tests of English ability than can institutions that have limited or no additional language training.

Although some institutions exempt from any further proof of English proficiency those students who have completed EFL (English as a Foreign Language) instruction at an English language institute, and others routinely test students after they arrive on campus, most schools require score reports from a recognized testing organization, most notably the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) provided by the Educational Testing Service (ETS). Other examinations, such as the academic version of the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), jointly managed by the University of Cambridge Local Examination Syndicate (UCLES), the British Council,

and IELTS Australia, and Pearson’s Test of English – Academic (PTEA) are being used by an increasing number of universities. Since a student’s ability to study material in the English language hinges on his/her English proficiency, an offer of admission should not be made unless it has been objectively verified that the student has adequate English proficiency for that campus environment. It is ill-advised to accept the word of faculty or other institutional employees that an international applicant has sufficient mastery of English. Postponement of admission pending improvement of English language skills is preferable to failure or unanticipated delays in degree completion due to language difficulties. The graduate dean should insist on proof of minimal English proficiency regardless of the pressures from departments.

As with all standardized exams, the TOEFL cannot provide a perfect measure of the English ability of the applicant, so absolute cut-off scores should not be used. The four sections of the internet-based TOEFL (iBT), the most common version of the test, are scored 0-30, for a total test score range of 0-120. On the paper-based TOEFL, scores are reported on a scale from 200-677, while section scores can range from 20-68. These scores are not related to the distribution of scores on any other test, such as the SAT or the GRE tests, so admissions personnel should be cognizant of this difference. The TOEFL test assesses four areas of language skills (listening, writing, reading, and speaking). Attention should be paid to each of these sections individually, not to just the total TOEFL score. In establishing the range of acceptable TOEFL scores, the institution should be guided by score use information regularly published by the Educational Testing Service at www.ets.org/toefl. Different fields of study may require different English proficiency levels, so acceptable TOEFL scores may vary by discipline as well as by institution.

The academic IELTS test includes four separate modules: listening, reading, writing, and speaking. The first three modules (listening, reading, and writing), available in both a computerized and paper version, must be completed in one day, with no break. The speaking module may be taken in the period seven days before or after the other modules. The results, available within two weeks of the test, provide scores on a band scale of 1 to 9 for each module, with 1 defined as a “Non User” (essentially has no ability to use the language beyond possibly a few isolated words) and 9 defined as an “Expert User” (has fully operational command of the language: appropriate, accurate, and fluent with complete understanding). The individual module scores are averaged and rounded to produce an overall band score. Overall band scores and listening and reading scores are reported in whole and half bands; writing and speaking band scores are reported in whole bands only.

The minimum IELTS scores required by an institution should depend upon the linguistic demands of specific programs. Universities are advised to consider both overall band scores and individual module band scores when making admission decisions. Generally, the minimum score for admission is an overall band score of either 6.0 or 6.5, with no individual band score below 5.0. A higher standard (a minimum overall band score of 7.0, with no individual band score below 6.0) is often required of applicants being considered for teaching assistantships or of those applying to programs that are linguistically demanding.

Pearson's Test of English–Academic (PTEA) measures overall English language competency in addition to providing feedback on reading, writing, listening and speaking skills. The score scale ranges from 10 to 90. The score report provides three types of scores: an overall score, scores for communication skills (listening, reading, speaking, and writing) and scores for enabling skills (i.e., grammar, oral fluency, pronunciation, spelling, vocabulary, and written discourse). The computer-based exam is administered at company test centers.

TOEFL, IELTS, and PTEA tests are not a measure of scholastic aptitude or ability to adapt to an English-speaking environment, but the scores can be useful in interpreting an applicant's performance on other standardized tests. When these English language test scores are low, high verbal scores on another standardized test (e.g., GRE) represent an inconsistency that should be investigated. On the other hand, when English language test scores are low and scores on another standardized test are also low, it is possible that the applicant's performance on the second test may have been impaired because of deficiencies in English.

Institutions should regularly evaluate their TOEFL, IELTS, and PTEA requirements to ensure they are consistent with the institution's own academic requirements and the language training resources available on the campus. Setting standards too high may deny qualified students admission to the graduate program. Setting them too low will result in a large number of students being unsuccessful because of language deficiencies. In addition, since a person's language proficiency may change with time, test results more than two years old may not be reliable and should be discounted as verification of current English ability.

Because a student's ability to use the English language can have a marked effect on academic success, institutions should waive this requirement only in extremely unusual cases and then only if they have adequate assurance that the applicant has the necessary English proficiency. It is important to clearly state the minimum scores required for admission so applicants who

are not sufficiently proficient in English do not waste either their own or the institution's time, or incur the costs (including the application fee, other test requirement fees, transcript fees, postage, etc.) associated with processing a full application.

Many international students have a strong desire to study in the United States and Canada, and there have been reported cases of falsified test scores submitted to institutions. Only official scores mailed directly from the testing service should be accepted. If questions arise regarding the validity of a test score, the institution should consult with the testing services to verify the accuracy of the scores and confirm whether an official report was issued.

With the increased availability of real-time communication at low cost, through Skype or other services, admission offices and academic selection committees are increasingly including a formal or information interview to assess candidates' proficiency in English. (See also *Interview* section, below.)

Optional Application Materials. Additional credentials required by some institutions, departments or programs may include standardized test scores, a personal statement, writing samples, resumes, or examples of the student's work. Some programs may request an interview or an audition; others may request submission of a portfolio or require verification of relevant work or research experience. Supporting materials required by a program should be requested only with a clear rationale for doing so. It is important to know what these materials are expected to demonstrate. It is equally important that the student be told what attributes are being assessed. In evaluating an applicant's dossier, the aim should be to understand the student's background in order to broaden the admissions committee's perception of the student's capabilities.

Standardized test scores: GRE, GMAT, Miller Analogies Test (MAT). Regardless of which test scores are required, admissions personnel must keep two major concepts in mind when evaluating the submitted results: 1) a test score should never be the sole criterion for acceptance or denial of admission, and 2) cutoff scores below which every applicant is categorically rejected are inappropriate. No test (indeed, no single admission credential) can measure all the skills needed for success in graduate school. A low test score does not necessarily reflect an applicant's inability to learn, but may reveal a deficiency due to a different educational, economic, or social background. A holistic approach utilizing multiple sources of information should be employed in the admissions process to identify students who not only have suitable academic credentials, but are committed to learning and motivated to succeed. Multiple criteria are particularly important when relying on standardized test scores to assess the abilities of educationally disadvantaged students, international

students, and students who are returning to school after an extended period of absence. Differences in early education and undergraduate course content and selection may result in lower test performance. Additionally, the GRE, GMAT, and MAT tests were developed for students who were educated in the United States. When interpreting a foreign student's score, linguistic, cultural, and educational factors must be considered.

Standardized tests are offered under special arrangements to students with disabilities. Because so few students with disabilities have taken tests under these non-standard conditions, and because different disabilities have highly varied effects on whether test scores accurately represent the developed abilities of the examinee as they will become apparent in graduate school, no normative data have been developed for interpreting the scores of these examinees. Institutions may wish to consider waiving the test score requirement for these students, or, with the understanding that the test score may not reflect the applicant's educational achievements, they may place less importance on its influence in the admissions decision.

Many students take standardized tests more than once. When more than one score is reported, several approaches to the interpretation of the score report are possible. One technique is to average the several reported scores. Both the GRE and the GMAT guidelines recommend this approach, especially if the tests were taken over a short period of time. Some departments prefer to use the most recent score reported, while others use the highest score reported. Whatever approach is adopted, it should be used consistently with all applicants.

A department that uses standardized tests in the admission process should attempt to demonstrate empirically the relationship between the test scores and measures of performance in its academic program. Programs can make use of the Graduate Record Examinations' Validity Study Service (for GRE scores) or the Graduate Management Admission Council's Validity Study Service (for GMAT scores), which are free of charge, or may conduct their own studies. Advice on the design of appropriate validation studies is available from GRE program staff free of charge.

Only official copies of score reports should be accepted. These should be sent directly from the testing program itself and not from the candidate or any third party. If scores are more than five years old, caution in their interpretation is advised. An applicant's developed ability may have changed either positively or negatively in the time since the exam was taken, depending upon life experiences.

When institutions use standardized test scores as part of the admissions

process, they have the responsibility of ensuring that all individuals who interpret these scores know the policies and guidelines established by the testing agency. They should monitor the use of the scores, and correct instances of misuse when identified. Users of GRE test scores should obtain and read the *Guidelines for the Use of GRE Scores* and other publications available on the GRE website (www.gre.org). GMAT test users should obtain and read the *Guide to the Use of GMAT Scores*, available from the Graduate Management Admission Council and at www.gmac.com. Miller Analogies Test users should read the *Examiner's Manual* published by Harcourt Assessment.

Distinctions between students should not be based upon small differences in standardized test scores. Standard errors of measurement vary by test and are available in the usage guides of the respective tests.

The GRE *Guidelines* recommend that scores from the various sections of the GRE (verbal, quantitative, and analytical writing) be used as three distinct measures which should not be combined. Since the kind of reasoning skills required for success varies by field, departments may wish to establish weights for the three measures reflecting the program's emphasis on particular skills. Should this be done, the weighting must be based on empirical evidence, and the reliability of such a measure should be tested by validity studies.

Effective with the worldwide introduction of the revised GRE General Test in August 2011, the maximum score obtainable on the Verbal Reasoning and Quantitative sections of the GRE General Test is 170 with a minimum score of 130; the Analytical Writing section score scale is 0-6. GRE Subject Test scores range from 200 to 990. GRE General Test scores are not directly comparable to GRE Subject Test scores or any other graduate or undergraduate admission test. Similarly, Subject Test scores should not be compared with scores on another Subject Test. For example, a 700 on the Physics Test is not equivalent to a 700 on the Mathematics Test. Percentile ranks should be compared only if they are based on the same reference population.

Subject tests have been used primarily for Ph.D. programs. For these programs, it has been found that subject test scores add significantly to GPA and scores on the GRE General Test as predictors of first-year graduate grades.

Total GMAT scores range from 200 to 800. Comparisons of a person's GMAT score with scores on the GRE or other admissions tests are not appropriate. The content of the tests are quite different and the populations taking the various tests have different characteristics. It is unwise to estimate a GMAT score from a person's GRE General Test score or vice versa. While the GMAT has been consistently shown to be a good predictor of performance in the first year of study in MBA or similar degree programs, it has not been

generally established that the GMAT is a valid predictor in other programs, such as a doctoral business program or programs in health administration or public administration. Use of the GMAT in these types of programs should be based on the results of individual institutions' validity studies.

The Miller Analogies Test consists of 100 analogy questions. Typically taken by applicants to education, social science, or humanities graduate programs, the test requires the student to synthesize from three given words a fourth word that best completes the analogy. Miller Analogies Test scores can range from 0 to 100, reflecting the number of questions answered correctly on the test. Two percentile scores are also given, one comparing the student's performance relative to individuals in the same intended major, the other ranking the student's performance within the general population of MAT examinees. Percentile norms for applicants to graduate programs by field of study are available from The Psychological Corporation. Foreign student scores are not included in the normal data.

Personal statement. Some programs ask students to provide a personal statement that may be open-ended or answers to specific questions. Typically, academic and career objectives, research activities or interest, work-related experiences, and other accomplishments are topics requested to be covered. The open-ended response gives the applicant an opportunity to provide further evidence of potential success as a graduate student that may not be reflected in the standard application materials, such as test scores or grade-point average. Attitudes, values, motivation, determination, and creativity may play an important role in assessing an applicant's potential for success. The department should have a systematic way of evaluating whatever statement it requires. (See Appendix B, section V for examples of Personal Statement forms.)

Writing sample or examples of an applicant's written work. As with the personal statement, some departments ask that a student submit a writing sample, such as a graded research paper, thesis, or other written evidence of research or writing ability. Whatever form it takes, the department should have a reason for requiring this material and a mechanism for assessing its value. Departments should also specify whether the subject matter of the writing sample must be relevant to the field.

Interview. Especially in program areas where personality characteristics can influence success in the field, such as counseling or social work, an interview can help identify those individuals who are likely to perform well in graduate school. Interviews also help students analyze their probable "fit" with the department. On-campus interviews should not be made compulsory

if travel to the institution causes an undue hardship for the applicant. Some institutions conduct interviews by telephone, send representatives out into the field to interview applicants closer to their homes, or provide travel assistance to bring students to campus. For international applicants, these approaches have limited value. When interviews are a significant element in the admissions process, the structure of the interview and the approach of the interviewer must assure an unbiased evaluation of the applicant. If interviews are not compulsory, serious consideration must be given to how an interview affects the admission decision. Rubrics or other standards-based scoring systems can be used to minimize interviewer bias. As noted previously, interviewers should be trained to avoid asking questions that are impermissible in the admission process (see Legal Issues, above).

Portfolios, auditions, and work/research experience. In many disciplines, faculty expect students to have had practical experience in the field. In order to assess an applicant's ability in the fine or creative arts, the submission of a portfolio or an audition (in person or in an electronic format) is generally required. Caution is needed when the applicant submits an audio-recorded voice sample or musical performance, since the possibility exists that the work is not the product of the applicant.

In business or management disciplines, where faculty expect to build on the knowledge base attained through prior or concurrent work experience, programs may require prior employment in a business environment. Prior research experience is a significant factor for entrance into most doctoral programs in the sciences.

Admissions Categories

Students whose records satisfy all general requirements for admission and have been judged by their proposed departments to be completely satisfactory for graduate study are accorded **Regular** or **Full** admission status. Students whose records fall short of meeting all general and departmental requirements may be awarded **Conditional** or **Provisional** status. This category may cover either of two situations: there is specific information, such as GRE scores, missing from the student's file, or the student is deficient in some academic area. These are very different cases. In the first, the student's records of prior work are incomplete but sufficient documents have been submitted to make a preliminary decision. The submitted documents indicate the student to be admissible, and all that is required for consideration for full admission

is that the missing items be submitted. In the second, the student's records are complete; based on the admission committee's evaluation, however, the admitting department is imposing additional requirements in order to further evaluate the student's academic ability or to compel the student to resolve academic deficiencies. In this case, the conditions imposed often consist of a requirement for a certain level of performance in a specified course or courses taken during the first term or year in graduate school. Students in this status should be told exactly what conditions must be met before they can petition for regular or full status. It is essential that the student's progress be tracked each term and if timely progress towards satisfying the provisional requirements is not made, that appropriate action be taken. This monitoring should be done by the graduate office, or, where no graduate school exists, at the school level. Students accepted with provisional status because of academic deficiencies should not be considered for assistantships until these deficiencies are removed.

Some departments admit students with bachelor's degrees directly into their doctoral programs, while other doctoral programs require a master's degree in the field before admission.

Because graduate studies often attract a much broader population than just degree-oriented students, many non-degree status designations appear in graduate admissions. Students may intend to transfer graduate credits to another institution, use graduate credits for professional development or a pre-master's certificate program, enroll for personal satisfaction, "prove" themselves academically qualified for a program that has not accepted them, or accomplish other ends. It is tempting to set up as many status categories as there are reasons for enrolling (e.g., Transfer Credit, Audit Only, Non-matriculating, Tentative, Special Status, etc.), but unless good reasons exist, it is better to minimize the number of categories and if possible, include all these non-degree students under one rubric such as **Non-matriculating, Special, Non-degree**.

Requirements for admission to a non-degree status vary widely across institutions. Some schools require the same entrance requirements as for degree students, others require only proof of a bachelor's degree, while still others are somewhere between these extremes. Since non-degree students will enroll in the same classes as degree seeking students, some mechanism should be in place to assure that the quality of graduate study is maintained. This is especially true when non-matriculating students are not admitted under the purview of the graduate school, as may occur when a separate continuing education office exists on a campus. Many institutions require departmental approval or permission of the instructor before a student is admitted to a class. Once permission is granted,

students are allowed to enroll on a space available basis.

Some institutions restrict registration of non-degree students to a set number of terms or courses. One reason for limiting the number of terms or courses for non-degree enrollment is to prevent a student from approaching degree status “through the back door” by taking most or all the coursework for a degree and then petitioning for degree candidacy. The difficulty with stating a maximum number of terms or courses for non-degree enrollment is that a student who reached that specified limit would have to gain matriculated admission to a degree program or take courses at another institution if he or she wished to continue taking courses. If the student does not choose to attend or cannot attend another school, but wishes to continue to take classes for personal enrichment only, he or she would have to apply to a degree program while having little interest in obtaining a degree. Therefore, rather than limit the number of terms or courses in non-degree status, it could be made clear at admission whether or not any credit earned in a non-degree status can be applied to a degree program, should the student later seek admission and be accepted for an advanced degree. A range of from 0 to 12 semester hours (0-16 quarter hours) is generally the maximum number of graduate credits that may be applied toward a graduate degree (most typically 9 semester or 10 quarter hours), pending approval of the department. Some institutions have the student sign a statement of understanding which informs the student that although an unlimited number of courses may be taken as a non-degree student (subject to other department restrictions), only a set maximum may be counted toward a degree. Such a statement also stipulates that taking courses as a non-degree student does not automatically evolve into matriculated admission to a degree program.

Many institutions have a special status for persons with a bachelor’s degree who are seeking to become certified teachers. Students in this category often take a combination of undergraduate and graduate courses, the completion of which does not lead to a degree. Upon successful completion of the prescribed coursework, they are eligible to apply for state teacher certification. Requirements for **Certification** status are generally the same as for degree-seeking students within the School of Education. As for all non-degree status students, it is recommended that a limit be placed on the number of credits of graduate study a student may take while in certification status. Since these students may plan to continue beyond the certification status to seek a master’s degree, careful monitoring of their progress will help ensure that they reapply to the appropriate degree program when eligible.

Students may request to have their admission **deferred** to a term later than the one originally specified on their application. Whether this request

is granted depends upon the nature and capacity of the program. Deferral of admission is usually denied in programs where the class size is fixed and enrollment of men and women from different backgrounds and demographic groups is sought to enhance the educational experience. In some cases, an applicant is simply added to the new pool of applicants for a subsequent term and will be re-evaluated for admission. Decisions to defer admission for one year or less are usually the prerogative of the department, as is the decision of whether the applicant must re-compete with the next group of applicants.

In cases where the numbers of qualified applicants exceed the space limitations of the program, some students may be placed on a waiting list. Accepted students should be asked to complete a “Statement of Intention to Register” form and may be required to remit a deposit to reserve their spots. Practices such as collecting enrollment deposits help institutions assess the probability that a student on a waiting list will gain admission, and permit a more reliable answer to student inquiries.

Some institutions may allow a student with incomplete application materials to temporarily register for graduate coursework. An applicant admitted under this condition must present complete application materials within the first term of enrollment. Such enrollment does not guarantee acceptance into the graduate program and the student should clearly understand this. The applicant is essentially a non-degree status student and the same conditions for course enrollment and course transferability to a graduate program should apply.

Readmission Policies

Formal application for re-admission should not be required of a student who is returning from an approved leave of absence. However, a student who has not been active in a graduate program for more than one term or year (depending on the institution’s policies) and who did not obtain a leave of absence should file a re-admission form. Some institutions also charge a re-admission fee. The department makes the determination as to whether the student’s status should be reactivated. If programmatic changes were made during the student’s absence, the department may hold the student to the new policies. At the time of reinstatement, students should also be informed as to their current status with regard to credits, time limits, and other factors affecting their programs.

Admitted applicants who did not enroll for the term in which they were

admitted and did not obtain permission to defer admission should consult the department to determine if they are eligible to enroll in the succeeding term or year. If a year or more has passed since admission was granted, the student should reapply. Supplementary transcripts covering any academic work completed since the initial application should be submitted. Since some institutions destroy application materials within a set time frame for applicants who did not enroll, the applicant should confirm that original application materials are still on file and still accurately reflect his or her academic background, and if not, resubmit the required documents.

Students who have been dismissed from the graduate program for academic reasons should address a written request for re-admission to the graduate department or program. The request should include reasons why the reinstatement should be considered. The department should review the request and make a recommendation to the graduate dean or administrator designated as the admitting officer for graduate programs. The final decision for re-admission in these cases should be made by the graduate dean/administrator in accordance with policies set by the institution (generally by a graduate council or similar body.)

Some institutions do not charge a fee for reapplication. Others require the same fee as for an original application, while still others require the fee only if the original file has been destroyed.

Transfer Policies

Students planning to transfer from one graduate institution to another should be required to submit the same admission credentials as the typical first-time applicant. If admission is granted, the student should be advised whether any of the coursework completed at the prior institution will apply toward the degree. For master's degree programs, a limited number of credits ranging from 6 to 12 semester hours (9 to 18 quarter hours) may be considered for transfer. An average of 6 semester hours (9 quarter hours) is generally the maximum allowed to be petitioned for transfer. In doctoral programs, at a minimum the transfer student should be required to take the comprehensive or admission-to-candidacy exams at the new institution. Coursework must have been taken at the graduate level and a minimum grade must have been earned (usually a 'B' or better). Coursework completed at another institution should not be transferred if it does not fall within the time-to-degree requirements set at the new institution, and some institutions require the coursework to have

been taken within a specific time frame (e.g., within two years of admission).

Students who request to transfer from one degree program to another within the same institution should complete a reapplication form. Such students should be in good academic standing (overall grade-point average of 3.0 or greater on a 4.0 scale) and hold full or regular status. Generally, the application credentials required by the new department will have to be submitted with the exception of transcripts already on file. The application should then be processed in the usual manner for a new applicant. The decision concerning which, if any, courses taken in the original program may apply to the new program should be made by the new department.

Advanced Admission for Undergraduates

Undergraduate students with exceptional academic backgrounds are frequently allowed to petition to take graduate coursework as part of their undergraduate experience. Permission to take graduate courses should be granted on a course by course basis, upon approval by the instructor, department head, and graduate dean or graduate division administrator. The total course load for an undergraduate student enrolled for graduate coursework should not exceed 15 semester hours.

These undergraduate students may later enroll in a graduate program and request graduate credit for this work. If the coursework was over and above the requirements for the undergraduate degree, as verified in writing by the undergraduate institution's registrar or other appropriate officer, a graduate institution may consider granting transfer credit in accordance with its general transfer credit policies, although this is generally done only for a school's own undergraduate/graduate students.

Application to More than One Degree Program

Some institutions explicitly prohibit applicants from applying to more than one degree program at a time. Others permit only one program application; however, an applicant may designate an alternative field on the application form. If admission to the first choice is denied, the application will be considered by the alternative field. Still other schools allow multiple applications. Since an overarching objective of graduate admissions should be to find a good match between the student and the department, and because a

student may not have time to apply to an alternate department after receiving a rejection of admission, it would seem that giving the student the opportunity to specify an alternative field would be in everyone's best interest. However, for some universities, allowing applicants to compete between programs within the same university for admissions and financial support can create difficulties that they wish to avoid.

At some institutions, students may apply to dual or concurrent degree programs and work toward completion of both degrees simultaneously. The policy of whether any courses can count toward both degrees should be set by a committee of graduate faculty (such as a graduate council) and approved by the appropriate state educational agencies, where necessary.

IV. IMPLEMENTING ADMISSION POLICY

The Admission Decision

The recommendation to accept or reject a student comes from a department, often through its school dean, to the graduate dean or designated official for final acceptance or denial of admission. Considering the wide variety of circumstances that influence the lives of today's graduate school applicants, departments are encouraged to be flexible in assessing applicants while still maintaining admission standards. When a goal of the institution is to increase multi-cultural, gender, socio/economic, or geographic diversity, to increase the number of under-represented students in a discipline, or to increase opportunities for the non-traditional (older) student, it is especially important that admissions personnel look for indicators of admissibility instead of the usual causes for rejection. Letters of recommendation, personal statements, a history of work and volunteer experiences that demonstrate potential for contribution to a field, and interviews may play a major role in determining the potential fit between these students and their chosen major field of study.

At the department or program level, recommendations for admission are generally made by the program director or by an admissions committee. Where a committee exists, both junior and senior faculty representing differing specializations within the department should serve on this committee. An effort should be made to include a mix of faculty by gender and ethnicity. The role of graduate students on the committee should be carefully considered in light of constraints upon their access to personal records of other students and liability factors associated with admissions decisions. In some cases where students serve on admissions committees, they do so as non-voting members. In all cases students should sign a statement indicating they have read, understand, and agree to abide by privacy laws governing student records involved in the admissions process.

To debate the merits of the applicant, admissions committees should meet together as a group rather than merely circulate the applicant's dossier. Acting alone, a committee member may not consider an important aspect of the application which could have a bearing on the admission decision. Meeting as a committee also helps prevent untimely delays in applicant processing, which is possible if a committee member fails to review the dossier in an expedient manner.

On occasion, factors other than the qualifications of the applicant affect the admissions decision. Institutional capacity can be a limiting factor. For example, if studio space facilitates only five sculptors, accepting more than five students would be unfair to both the students and the faculty. If the faculty members in a department decide to limit the number of advisees any faculty member may have, then the department should not accept more than that number of students in each advisor's specialty. If the program does not offer the specialty desired by the applicant, the student should not be admitted. The overriding criterion here is that the department should deliver what it promises to the student, including adequate resources, access to an appropriate advisor, and the opportunity to complete the requirements for the degree.

In most instances, particularly for doctoral programs, admissions and financial support decisions will be strongly linked. Few students will have private funding to cover many years of graduate study and in many instances multi-year packages of intramural funding – through research grants, fellowships, teaching assistantships – can be tailored to facilitate and enhance student progress through a doctoral program. Students admitted with extramural funding (e.g., a portable fellowship) may relieve stress from limited university funding sources but they should meet or exceed the same qualifications (e.g., grade point average or ESL test scores) as others who are part of an admissions cohort. Some self-supported students, particularly in master's and professional degree programs, may be considered for admission. However, having to rely on one's own resources may extend the time-to-degree and in some instances may reduce the likelihood that a student will complete the degree.¹² It is important, therefore, that self-funded students have an understanding of the real costs of graduate education, including tuition, supplies, housing, health coverage, child care, etc.

If an international applicant requires a visa but has not submitted sufficient financial documentation, many institutions will inform the applicant that he/she is academically admissible, but cannot be officially admitted until financial certification has been received and visa documents can be issued.

Also, as noted above, students who have outside financial backing should not be given preferential consideration in the admissions process. The department should be aware that preliminary screening by outside agencies, even when they provide financial backing, does not ensure that the student is qualified for academic study. This may be especially true for many international students with external funding.

At the graduate office level, departmental admissions recommendations

¹² Bowen and Rudenstine, *In Pursuit of the PhD*, Princeton University Press, 1992, p. 191.

are usually accepted except in special circumstances. The graduate school should make the final determination for applicants who do not meet the minimal standards of admission yet are recommended for admission by the department. There will inevitably be requests for special consideration for certain students who, for example, claim difficulties in taking standardized tests or fall short on one or more of the baseline standards. Review of these requests is generally carried out by the graduate dean or other designated administrator who can view the effects of this admission on the general admission policies of the institution. Further, particular attention should be paid to applications from under-represented populations. Rejections of qualified students in these categories should be questioned.

Although admission to graduate school is based mainly on academic preparation and potential, the university may wish to deny admission based on non-academic factors, such as criminal history or prior college disciplinary history. In such cases, clear guidelines should be stated in admissions documents.

Admission Processing

The interests of both the student and the institution are best served when applications are processed and students are notified of the admission decision in a timely fashion. In centralized systems, departmental information on potential students must be brought into the admissions process as soon as possible, and for decentralized systems, current information received by the graduate office or administrative unit must be disseminated to the departments shortly after it is received. Utilizing a centralized data management system is crucial in efficiently tracking materials and keeping both units informed of documents on hand and the status of the application.

Applicants should be encouraged to follow a “student-managed” process when submitting their application and supporting documents. If the university has a fully developed online admissions system, the applicant should be required to submit as much of the application as possible electronically. For applications and supporting documents submitted by paper rather than online, it is recommended that applicants submit them all together to the admissions office, either centralized or department office. This process saves the university time tracking the receipt of application materials, and keeps the applicant well informed. In reviewing any documents submitted through the applicant, however, admissions staff and faculty must be particularly alert to possibilities of fraud.

Rolling versus Fixed-Date Admissions. Some institutions or departments practice a form of rolling admissions whereby applicants' dossiers are evaluated as soon as all credentials are received, or they are held and evaluated on a set basis (e.g., biweekly review) which may vary according to application workload (e.g., monthly during slow periods, but weekly during busy periods). Under rolling admissions, the applicant is notified of the admission decision shortly after it is made. Other universities use a fixed-date notification system in which all candidates for admission are notified of the admission decision on a predetermined date (typically April 1 for fall matriculation).

Rolling date admissions are generally preferred by discipline-based humanities and sciences departments, while some of the professional departments or schools prefer fixed-date admissions. Rolling admissions works best in those graduate programs that do not have fixed class sizes. An advantage of rolling admissions is that applications are reviewed shortly after they come in and students receive an answer rather quickly. This minimizes the student's motivation to search elsewhere and helps the student set future plans as quickly as possible. From the administrative point of view, rolling admissions spreads the burden of processing admissions over a period of several months.

On the other hand, fixed-date admissions enable all dossiers to be reviewed at the same time with the same standards being applied to all applicants. A fixed review method should be followed when class sizes are fixed, to ensure the best possible entering class. Since more time is generally required to evaluate an admissions file for an international applicant, in some instances earlier application deadlines are necessary for this group so that they can be evaluated with the domestic applications.

When a department uses rolling admissions, it may choose to wait until a sufficient number of applications are submitted before holding a committee meeting. However, the department should not unduly delay processing admission dossiers. Some institutions may set a time limit, usually two to four weeks, to ensure that departments respond expeditiously to applications. Every effort should be made to notify the graduate school of the admission decision in a timely manner.

The membership of the Council of Graduate Schools has supported the *CGS Resolution Regarding Graduate Scholars, Fellows, Trainees and Assistants*. The *Resolution* focuses on financial support of graduate students (see section on Financial Considerations) which indirectly affects admission decision timing. In order to abide by the CGS Resolution's guidelines, wherein applicants have until April 15 to accept offers of financial assistance,

all institutions need to inform prospective students of both admission and financial aid decisions before April 15. (See http://www.cgsnet.org/ckfinder/userfiles/files/CGS_Resolution.pdf).

Challenges and Opportunities in Admission Processing. In today's economic and political environment, graduate admissions offices are reporting a variety of challenges: maintaining the quality of services with decreased budgets and staff resources caused by reductions in legislative funding and endowment revenue; keeping up-to-date with technological innovations; and continuing to attract international students in an era of growing administrative burden and increased competition from abroad. Institutions have learned they must continually reassess their processes and procedures and be more flexible and responsive.

Time-saving approaches to speed initial review of applicants are becoming the norm: accepting student-reported grade-point averages, unofficial transcripts, and/or student copies of standardized test scores. These undocumented data are used only in the screening or evaluation stage of the application process. All applicants recommended for admission must provide official copies of all credentials prior to either acceptance or matriculation. Prospective applicants are informed that a material misrepresentation of data might result in their acceptance being withdrawn. In most cases, departments are given the option of requiring official credentials for evaluation purposes or permitting applicant submitted data. Self-reported grade-point averages provided separately for each institution attended are usually accurate, but overall GPAs from applicants who have completed coursework at multiple institutions are more likely to be error-ridden, due to arithmetic errors, failure to consider properly a mixture of quarter and semester hour credits, or "ignoring" certain courses with grades of 'D' or 'F.' However, as long as applicants clearly understand that unofficial documents will be carefully compared to official ones prior to matriculation, the likelihood of submitting altered materials is reasonably unlikely.

Some institutions have found that staggering application deadlines by department over a period of two or more months helps relieve the backlog of GPA calculations and evaluations in the admissions office by leveling the peak. Others compute GPAs only when the department indicates they are needed. When the GPA is obviously very high or very low, precise computation may be deemed unnecessary.

Technological Innovations. The benefits of using the most current technology outweigh the challenges of investment costs and generally provide costs savings. The increased use of online applications and e-mail, text

messaging, social media, and CRM technology have reduced postage, printing and staffing costs; the turnaround time for processing and evaluating applications has been reduced, e-mail offers more timely; and frequent communication with applicant, and, as applicants can check their status online, staff time spent responding to these requests is reduced and applicant satisfaction is increased. Not having these systems in place will place a university at a disadvantage in the highly competitive and market-driven world of graduate enrollment management, where CRM is considered a high priority among administration, faculty, and the technology-smart applicants of today.

Social Media. The use of social media in graduate enrollment management has increased significantly in recent years as well. While many institutions entered this world cautiously, it has now become the norm for communicating and engaging students. The Millennial Generation (those born 1984-2005) is entering graduate school. They are comfortable communicating with peers through channels such as Skype, Facebook, YouTube, Google, Twitter, LinkedIn and Flickr, and they expect institutions to employ the same tools. Millennials are not alone in responding to the social media wave; more than 77% of adults aged 18-24 have a social network profile while 65% of adults between the ages of 25-34 have one.¹³ Institutions are increasing their social media presence is because prospective students are increasing researching schools online without ever sending an inquiry to a college or university. The only time their identity is known is when they submit an application for admission, yet they could have been online and engaging in communication for quite some time. By participating in social media, institutions can now become part of the conversation. These prospective students are commonly called “stealth applicants.” The familiar admission funnel metaphor is no longer the norm. The funnel has changed. Many institutions have fewer prospects in their databases, but record numbers of applicants and students. This can be attributed to the notion of the stealth applicant.

As this edition of the *Essential Guide* goes to press, Facebook reports that it has 800 million users, one half of whom visit the site at least once each day. Many institutions are utilizing social media to advertise and market. Through search engine optimization and search engine marketing, institutions can profile Facebook users and engage with prospects who visit their sites.

Evaluating an Applicant with an Incomplete Dossier. Occasionally a candidate or a department may request that the student be considered for admission before all credentials are submitted. In general, it is advisable to

13 *The Infinite Dial 2010: Digital Platforms and the Future of Radio*, Edison Research, April 8th, 2010, http://www.edisonresearch.com/infinite_dial_presentation_2010_reva.pdf

require a complete file to admit a student, although in some cases it might be safe to reject a student based upon an incomplete dossier. Early notice of non-acceptance gives the student an opportunity to apply in a timely fashion to other schools or to look for alternative career opportunities. This practice is particularly appropriate for international students for whom requiring a complete dossier can create a great hardship. Some institutions have adopted a preliminary admission procedure for the foreign applicant to provide an early screening process to identify candidates who are not qualified for admission to the program, usually because of low TOEFL, IELTS or PTEA scores or inadequate academic preparation. Especially for those students who must travel great distances to take the GRE or for whom test costs are beyond their means, to be told that a program is not appropriate or that their academic background is not sufficient for admission before taking the exam is humanitarian. However, some universities have found that this preliminary application is not useful because of timing problems or added personnel costs.

Generally, no student should be admitted before all required credentials are submitted. However, unusual circumstances might lead a department to request an early admission decision even though some application material, such as a letter of recommendation or a transcript of a minor portion of the student's record, has not been received. An example of this situation might be when a student with exceptional talent in a subject area expresses a desire to work with a distinguished professor in that field, and the professor requests an early admission decision. In these special cases, a system should be established to properly and evenhandedly evaluate the merits of a request for admission prior to all credentials being received. The graduate school should develop a form through its admissions exception processes (which might be called a "Form to Expedite Admission") that the graduate program director could fill out and submit to the graduate school. The form would request a rationale for admitting the student without the required documentation. The graduate dean would then make the determination of whether early admission is warranted.

In cases where the department requires additional material beyond that required by the graduate school, the department may ask to waive any of this documentation but should provide justification for the request. The graduate dean or division graduate administrator may then approve or deny the waiver request.

International Applicants. International applicants increasingly experience a broad set of challenges that are far too complex to sufficiently cover in this booklet. For a detailed discussion, see the CGS publication, *Graduate Study in the United States: A Guide for Prospective International Graduate Students*, 2007.

Generally speaking, in response to the time and administrative process involved in obtaining visas, many universities are setting earlier deadlines for international applicants and expanding guidelines and other informational materials provided to international students. Additionally, in an attempt to shorten visa processing time, if an international student is being admitted to a field included in the State Department's Technology Alert List (TAL), some academic departments include in the admit packet a letter that describes the specific type of research with which the student will be involved.

The Use of Paid Agents. Admissions personnel and faculty involved in the graduate admission process should be aware of the unique approaches and resources often utilized by international applicants to identify programs of study and to gain admission to those programs. One such strategy is the use by students (and their parents) of paid agents. Agents charge a fee to provide advice regarding the application process and, in many instances, assist the student in preparing his/her application materials. In some countries, the use of agents is especially prevalent.

It should be recognized that, while many agents perform their tasks with high ethical standards and responsible attention to the best interests of both student and institution, some agents go far beyond "coaching" the applicant and literally author the applicant's essays, statements of purpose, etc. On occasion, unscrupulous agents will even assist with providing fraudulent transcripts, test score reports and other application credentials. Those involved in the graduate admissions process should be trained to carefully examine all application materials for instances of inconsistency or fraud, and to confirm to the extent possible that what the candidate has provided has not been prepared by any other person.

Increasingly, institutions are also considering using paid agents to assist them in identifying and enrolling international students. Institutions typically pay an agent only when a student referred by that agent has been successfully recruited and has actually enrolled in the institution. The agent's fee is often a percentage of the first-year tuition amount, though other approaches to compensating agents also exist.

Many institutions, and several U.S. higher education organizations, have expressed concerns regarding the potential conflicts of interest, ethical dilemmas, fraud, and other abuses of students and institutions that can result from an institution's paid use of agents. Undoubtedly, the issue of utilizing paid agents will continue to be debated both publicly and on campuses, and careful consideration of the use of agents should be exercised.

Monitoring Special-Interest Applications. Many institutions have special

initiatives to increase participation of under-represented groups in several academic areas.¹⁴ When this is the case, it is important to set up a monitoring system for these applications to track the success of the effort. Students in these special categories need to be identified and the admission recommendation examined by someone in the graduate office. When a student who appears to meet graduate school and departmental standards is rejected, a discussion with the department may result in a decision to admit the student, or the department may verify that the decision not to admit was made for valid reasons, such as space limitations or incompatible research interests of the student and faculty.

The Appeal Process

When a student is denied admission, it is important that the specific reasons are stated in the student's file. A student who requests the information should also be informed of the reasons for the rejection. It is important for the university to establish and disseminate a faculty council- and campus counsel-approved policy and procedure for appeals, and for staff and faculty to work with campus counsel on difficult cases. If the applicant appeals the decision, the administrator who had the final authority in making the rejection decision should ascertain whether any policies or procedures were violated in the case. If so, the admission decision should be reviewed. Some institutions request that a committee, such as an executive committee or a subcommittee of the graduate council, review the application.

14 The *CGS Inclusiveness Series* of publications (2004), including *Achieving an Inclusive Graduate Community* (Volume 1), *Recruiting for Success* (Volume 2) and *Ensuring Success* (Volume 3), provide examples of how schools have successfully accomplished this goal.

V. EVALUATING ADMISSION POLICIES

The graduate admissions process is, at best, a method for deciding on the best mix of students commensurate with the philosophy and goals of the department. However, since all the skills necessary to succeed in graduate programs are not measurable, any admission criteria cannot be viewed as perfect. For this reason, it is imperative that every program evaluate the effects of its admission policies on an annual basis.

An important factor in evaluating the success of the admissions process is the determination of student success (or failure) as correlated with his or her admission credentials. Evaluation questions include: Do students who were admitted provisionally with academic deficiencies perform any differently in the program than those who were admitted with regular status? Are the credentials of those students who ‘succeed’ any different from those who do not complete the program due to academic difficulties? Why do students whom we predicted would succeed not succeed?

To effectively evaluate the admissions policies, a centralized graduate enrollment database that tracks the inquiry, applicant, and student enrollment pools is a necessity. Demographic information, including gender, age, citizenship, and ethnicity, as well as the undergraduate major, undergraduate institution, undergraduate grade-point average, and standardized test scores (GRE, GMAT, MAT, TOEFL, IELTS, PTEA, etc.) should be recorded. The graduate program name, admission decision, category of admission, and degree sought should be entered for each applicant. Data should be maintained on the number of inquiries, applications, admissions, and enrollments for each department, either on a term or a yearly basis. Also, when possible, the reasons why an accepted applicant chose not to attend should be included in the database.

Using these data, the characteristics of the applicant pool can be examined and changes over time detected. An analysis by program of what percent of applicants are being admitted will give an indication of which programs are more selective than others. Comparisons with national percentage acceptance rates by program may lead to revised admission policies in those programs where large discrepancies exist. A student profile for each program in which the population characteristics of sex, age, ethnicity, citizenship, and geographic

location are tabulated will show whether diversity goals are being met and where further efforts are needed. An analysis of the matriculation rates by program, including percentages and demographics of those who actually enroll, may indicate where problems exist.

The data can be used also to predict enrollments, which is especially useful if the institution must react to sudden demands to reduce enrollments or budgets. Shifts in student interests may prompt a shift in institutional resources.

A knowledge of which undergraduate institutions are feeder schools is helpful in targeting recruitment efforts. A comparison of where underrepresented student groups who currently are attending the graduate school received their bachelor's degrees with those institutions that award degrees to large numbers of these students may lead to a reassessment of recruiting practices at those institutions.

VI. POST-ADMISSION DECISION ACTIVITY

It is critical that departments and graduate schools follow up on admission offers to increase the likelihood that admitted students will actually enroll. Graduate school or department newsletters, orientation materials, and other campus information on such issues as housing availability, fitness facilities, or health insurance options might be sent out at intervals to keep the institutional image in mind. It is important that the student have direct contact with their assigned faculty advisor prior to arriving on campus, and asking current graduate students to contact their incoming colleagues can also be successful in both encouraging matriculation and smoothing a student's transition to graduate study. Accepted applicants should be encouraged to visit the campus to talk with faculty and students and to see the facilities.

Whenever possible, it is also informative to determine why offers of admission are declined. Some reasons for not matriculating (e.g., obtaining a job, experiencing health problems) may be unrelated to specific university or program factors. But if specific academic, financial or environmental reasons seem to recur, the institution or department may wish to make changes in policies or practices or reallocate resources to alleviate the problems, if it is within their domain to do so. Academic reasons might include perceptions of inadequate laboratory or library facilities or the absence of a desired specialty. Financial reasons might include a perception that the amount of financial support was insufficient, financial aid was not competitive with other institutions' offers, or financial aid was offered too late. Environmental reasons might relate to housing availability, safety factors on campus and in the community, or support services such as child care.

VII. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Application Fee

Most institutions charge all applicants an application fee, which may vary by program. This application fee is almost always non-refundable. Some university systems centrally establish the application fee level (and some retain the income). If possible, the amount of the fee should be determined by the reason for which it is charged. To encourage electronic applications where both paper-based and electronic application alternatives are offered, some institutions impose a higher application fee for paper, as opposed to electronic, submissions. Many universities assess this fee to offset the cost of processing the application, particularly in terms of paying for rapidly increasing costs for technology, but it has also been used to discourage frivolous applications. Because of the additional processing requirements for international applications, some institutions charge a higher fee for this group. It is practical to consider the application fee of schools comparable to your own institution when setting the fee.

Institutions may consider waiving the application fee for applicants with financial need. Universities may consider waiving the fee of current undergraduates upon receipt of certification by a financial aid coordinator at the applicant's undergraduate institution that the student has significant financial need. Many institutions also waive the application fee for students involved with special programs, such as the McNair Scholars Program or PROJECT 1000. These programs are not usually available for international applicants or for students who are no longer in college. For this growing population of applicants, some other mechanism for showing financial need is required. This might be achieved by requesting that the applicant to write a letter explaining the financial circumstances which necessitate the fee waiver request. It is then up to the individual institution whether to waive the fee. The graduate admissions administrator should be aware of those countries in which it is difficult for the applicant to remove money, and in these cases, may consider either waiving the fee or requiring its payment after the student arrives in the country. It is also common for private universities to waive the application fee for alumni and for applicants currently enrolled at the institution in an undergraduate or another graduate degree program.

Graduate Student Support

Institutional graduate student support normally occurs in the form of fellowships, teaching assistantships, research assistantships, administrative assistantships, and/or tuition scholarships. Research assistantships are generally dependent upon a particular match between student and faculty member, and if awarded to a new student, are often done so at the same time that his or her acceptance is offered. All other graduate student support, particularly merit fellowships and tuition scholarships, should be awarded following a review of all applicants. This enables the institution to rank these applicants and award aid to the most qualified. The determination of these awards should be made by a faculty committee with the participation of administrators who can oversee the effective distribution of resources. The student should be informed of the award by the graduate office (or in institutions with no graduate school, by the same individual who offers admission to the student). This ensures that offers of financial assistance are not made prematurely (before a student has been admitted) and serves as a check on allocation of funding.

In addition, the *CGS Resolution Regarding Graduate Scholars, Fellows, Trainees, and Assistants* (Appendix A) should accompany the award letter. Students are under no obligation to respond to offers of financial support prior to April 15, and if they do so, they may withdraw this acceptance in writing at any time through that date. An acceptance made on or after April 15 commits the student not to accept any other offer without first getting a release in writing from the institution to whom the commitment is made. Similarly, an offer made by an institution after April 15 is conditional on presentation by the student of a written release from any previously accepted offer. When the offer of financial aid is sent from the graduate office, it is less likely that a department or student will violate the spirit of this agreement.

VIII. CONCLUSION

This booklet was written for the purpose of describing good practices in graduate enrollment management. While each institution may implement graduate admissions activities in its own fashion, in all cases the academic departments play a critical role in determining who will ultimately make up the community of scholars at the university. It is vital that the faculty involved in admissions decisions be cognizant of the issues relating to graduate admissions, including federal and state laws and regulations, university-wide policies and procedures, and departmental guidelines.

The role of the graduate school or graduate administrative unit in this process should be one of maintaining quality standards as established by a council of the faculty, and providing resources as well as policy guidance in matters of admission. Friendly relationships with departments must be maintained with timely interchange of information both to and from the graduate school and the department.

Effective graduate enrollment is ensured by effective integration of customer relations and data management, which is greatly facilitated by current technologies. These advances come at an opportune time, as increasing competitiveness in both domestic and international graduate admission arenas as well as financial and political exigencies make it all the more necessary for institutions to consider strategic planning in recruitment, enrollment, and graduation at the graduate level.

A range of options for the various graduate admissions functions have been presented here, with some discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of each. Each institution must determine how best to administer graduate enrollment management so that quality, efficiency, and equity are achieved.

Appendix A

CGS Resolution Regarding Graduate Scholars, Fellows, Trainees and Assistants



Council of Graduate Schools

Resolution Regarding Graduate Scholars, Fellows, Trainees and Assistants

Acceptance of an offer of financial support *(such as a graduate scholarship, fellowship, traineeship, or assistantship) for the next academic year by a prospective or enrolled graduate student completes an agreement that both student and graduate school expect to honor. In that context, the conditions affecting such offers and their acceptance must be defined carefully and understood by all parties.

Students are under no obligation to respond to offers of financial support prior to April 15; earlier deadlines for acceptance of such offers violate the intent of this Resolution. In those instances in which a student accepts an offer before April 15, and subsequently desires to withdraw that acceptance, the student may submit in writing a resignation of the appointment at any time through April 15. However, an acceptance given or left in force after April 15 commits the student not to accept another offer without first obtaining a written release from the institution to which a commitment has been made. Similarly, an offer by an institution after April 15 is conditional on presentation by the student of the written release from any previously accepted offer. It is further agreed by the institutions and organizations subscribing to the above Resolution that a copy of this Resolution or a link to the URL should accompany every scholarship, fellowship, traineeship, and assistantship offer.

The following list includes CGS member institutions that indicated their support of the Resolution.

This Resolution was renewed October 2009.

Abilene Christian University	California University of Pennsylvania	Florida A & M University	Louisiana State University and
Air Force Institute of Technology	Case Western Reserve University	Florida Atlantic University	A & M College
Alcorn State University	Catholic University of America	Florida International University	Louisiana State University
Alfred University	Central Michigan University	Florida State University	Health Sciences Center
American University	Central Missouri State University	Fordham University	Loyola Marymount University
Andrews University	Central Washington University	Fort Hays State University	Loyola University of Chicago
Angelo State University	City University of New York	Gallaudet University	Marquette University
Appalachian State University	Graduate Center	George Mason University	Marshall University
Arizona State University	Claremont Graduate University	George Washington University	Marywood University
Arkansas State University	Clark Atlanta University	Georgetown University	Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Auburn University	Clark University	Georgia Institute of Technology	Medical College of Georgia
Austin Peay State University	Clemson University	Georgia Southern University	Medical College of Ohio
Ball State University	Cleveland State University	Georgia State University	Medical College of Wisconsin
Baylor College of Medicine	College of Charleston	Hampton University	Medical University of South Carolina
Baylor University	College of New Jersey	Harvard University	Miami University
Bloomsburg University of Penn.	College of Saint Rose	Hebrew Union College - Jewish	Michigan State University
Boise State University	College of William and Mary	Institute of Religion	Michigan Technological University
Boston College	Colorado School of Mines	High Point University	Middle Tennessee State University
Boston University	Columbia University	Hofstra University	Minnesota State University - Mankato
Bowling Green State University	Concordia University, River Forest	Hood College	Mississippi State University
Bradley University	Coppin State College	Howard University	Missouri State University
Brandeis University	Cornell University	Idaho State University	Montana State University - Bozeman
Brigham Young University	Creighton University	Illinois Institute of Technology	Montclair State University
Brown University	Dartmouth College	Illinois State University	Mount Mary College
Bryn Mawr College	Drew University	Indiana State University	Murray State University
Caldwell College	Drexel University	Indiana University	National University
California Institute of Technology	Duke University	Indiana University - Purdue University	Naval Postgraduate School
California State Polytechnic	Duquesne University	Fort Wayne	New Jersey Institute of Technology
University, Pomona	East Carolina University	Indiana University of Pennsylvania	New Mexico State University
California State University, Bakersfield	East Central University	Iowa State University	New York Medical College
California State University, Fresno	East Tennessee State University	Jackson State University	New York University
California State University, Fullerton	Eastern Illinois University	James Madison University	North Carolina Agricultural & Technical
California State University, Hayward	Eastern Kentucky University	John Carroll University	State University
California State University,	Eastern Michigan University	Johns Hopkins University	North Carolina State University
Long Beach	Eastern Washington University	Kansas State University	at Raleigh
California State University,	Emerson College	Kent State University	North Dakota State University
Los Angeles	Emory University	Lamar University	Northeastern Illinois University
California State University, Northridge	Emporia State University	Langston University	Northern Arizona University
California State University,	Fayetteville State University	Lehigh University	Northern Illinois University
Sacramento	Fairmont State University	Lipscomb University	Northern Michigan University
California State University,	Fielding Graduate Institute	Loma Linda University	Northwestern State University
Stanislaus	Fitchburg State College		of Louisiana

* This Resolution applies to offers of financial support only, not offers of admission.

APPENDIX A

CGS - Resolution Regarding Graduate Scholars, Fellows, Trainees and Assistants (continued)

Northwestern University	Tennessee Technological University	University of Kansas	University of South Florida
Nova Southeastern University	Texas A & M International University	University of Kentucky	University of Southern California
Oakland University	Texas A & M University	University of Louisiana at Lafayette	University of Southern Mississippi
Ohio University	Texas A & M University - Corpus Christi	University of Louisville	University of Tennessee
Ohio State University	Texas Christian University	University of Maine	at Chattanooga
Oklahoma State University	Texas Southern University	University of Maryland, Baltimore County	University of Tennessee at Knoxville
Old Dominion University	Texas State University, San Marcos	University of Maryland, College Park	University of Texas at Arlington
Oregon State University	Texas Tech University	University of Massachusetts Amherst	University of Texas at Austin
Park University	Texas Woman's University	University of Massachusetts Boston	University of Texas at Brownsville
Pennsylvania State University	Towson University	University of Massachusetts Lowell	University of Texas at Dallas
Pepperdine University	Trinity University	The University of Memphis	University of Texas at San Antonio
Pittsburg State University	Truman State University	University of Miami	University of Texas Graduate School of Biomedical Science at Galveston
Polytechnic University	Tufts University	University of Michigan	University of Texas Grad School of Biomedical Science at Houston
Princeton University	Tulane University	University of Minnesota	University of Texas Grad School of Biomedical Science at Houston
Purdue University	University of Buffalo, State University of New York	University of Mississippi	University of Texas Grad School of Biomedical Science at San Antonio
Queens College of the City University of New York	University of Akron	University of Missouri, Columbia	University of the Pacific
Radford University	University of Alabama	University of Missouri, Kansas City	University of Toledo
Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute	University of Alabama at Birmingham	University of Missouri, St. Louis	University of Tulsa
Rice University	University of Alabama in Huntsville	University of Montana	University of Utah
Rockefeller University	University of Alaska, Fairbanks	University of Nebraska-Kearney	University of Vermont
Rockhurst University	University of Albany, State University of New York	University of Nebraska-Lincoln	University of Virginia
Rosalind Franklin University of Medicine and Science	University of Arizona	University of Nebraska-Omaha	University of Washington
Rowan University	University of Arkansas	University of Nevada-Las Vegas	University of Wisconsin - Eau Claire
Rutgers - New Brunswick	University of Arkansas at Fayetteville	University of Nevada-Reno	University of Wisconsin - La Crosse
Rutgers - Newark	University of Bridgeport	University of New Hampshire	University of Wisconsin - Madison
St. Bonaventure University	University of California, Berkeley	University of New Haven	University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee
St. Cloud State University	University of California, Davis	University of New Mexico	University of Wyoming
St. John's University	University of California, Irvine	University of New Orleans	Utah State University
Saint Louis University	University of California, Los Angeles	University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill	Valdosta State University
San Diego State University	University of California, Riverside	University of North Carolina at Charlotte	Vanderbilt University
San Francisco State University	University of California, San Diego	University of North Carolina at Greensboro	Villanova University
San Jose State University	University of California, San Francisco	University of North Dakota	Virginia Commonwealth University
Santa Clara University	University of California, Santa Barbara	University of North Texas	Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
Shippensburg University	University of Central Arkansas	University of North Texas Health Science Center - Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences	Wake Forest University
South Carolina State University	University of Central Florida	University of Northern Colorado	Walden University
South Dakota School of Mines & Technology	University of Chicago	University of Northern Iowa	Washington State University
South Dakota State University	University of Cincinnati	University of Notre Dame	Washington University
Southeast Missouri State University	University of Colorado at Boulder	University of Oklahoma	Wayne State University
Southern Illinois University at Carbondale	University of Colorado at Denver	University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center	West Virginia University
Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville	University of Connecticut	University of Oregon	West Virginia Wesleyan College
Southern Methodist University	University of Dayton	University of Pennsylvania	Western Carolina University
Southern University A&M College	University of Delaware	University of Pittsburgh	Western Illinois University
Spalding University	University of Denver	University of Puerto Rico - Rio Piedras Campus	Western Kentucky University
Stanford University	University of the District of Columbia	University of Rhode Island	Western Michigan University
State University of New York at Binghamton	University of Florida	University of Rochester	Western Washington University
State University of New York - Upstate Medical University	University of Georgia	University of San Diego	Wichita State University
State University of New York at Stony Brook	University of Hartford	University of Scranton	Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution
Syracuse University	University of Hawaii at Manoa	University of South Alabama	Worcester Polytechnic Institute
Temple University	University of Houston	University of South Carolina	Wright State University
Tennessee State University	University of Idaho		Xavier University of Louisiana
	University of Illinois at Chicago		Yale University
	University of Illinois at Springfield		
	University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign		
	University of Iowa		



Council of Graduate Schools
One Dupont Circle, NW, 230
Washington, DC 20036
202-223-3791
202-331-7157 (fax)

Appendix B

Examples of Graduate Program Application Materials

I. General Information: Status and Notification

YOUR ADMISSION STATUS
 You may be admitted to the Graduate School under the following categories:

- **Regular Graduate Student**—a student who has been accepted by the university and by a major department/program to work toward an advanced degree or certificate.
- **Conditionally Admitted Graduate Student**—a student who has not met the formal admission requirements but whose accomplishments have convinced the University Graduate Admissions Committee and the proposed major department/program that he or she has potential for success as an advanced degree or graduate certificate candidate.
- **Provisionally Admitted Graduate Student**—a student who has met all university criteria for admission but who has not yet met all of the additional requirements specific to the academic department/program.

Once you are admitted, you should be certain you understand your admission status. Official admission is granted by the "Letter of Admission" from the Office of Admissions and is effective only for the term specified in the letter. If you wish to postpone your enrollment and attend in a future term, please submit a letter of your intent to the Office of Admissions. The application fee is effective for two academic years from the date of your initial application.
 Applicants for a different academic year will be required to submit a new application form. New academic years begin with summer term.

Source: *Oregon State University*

II. Application Forms

A. Biographical Information

Part II: Personal Information (Must be completed by all applicants.)

Name _____
Surname/Family/Last Given/First Middle Maiden/Other

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Postal Code or Zip _____ Country _____

Home Phone _____ Work Phone _____ E-mail Address _____
(include area code) (include area code)

Male Female Date of Birth _____ / _____ / _____ Social Security Number _____
(mm/dd/yy)

Source: *Bradley University*

B. Visa Information

9. Country of Citizenship _____ Country of Birth _____

Native Language (if other than English) _____ What language do you speak at home? _____

If not a U.S. citizen: Are you a permanent resident of the U.S.? Yes No

Alien Registration Number _____ Current non-immigrant status _____

Are you currently in the U.S.? Yes No (if yes, please attach photocopies of relevant documents)

Source: *University of Maryland-Baltimore County (UMBC)*

Citizenship: U.S. U.S. Permanent Resident: Green Card No. _____ International: _____ country _____ visa type _____ held desired

Source: *Columbia University*

APPENDIX B

C. Ethnic Survey

INFORMATION REQUEST (OPTIONAL)

The information requested below is used to comply with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. As an applicant, responding to these questions is optional and your response will in no way affect your admission. However, we are asking for the information now to avoid a separate request once a person is an enrolled student. We use the data in aggregated form only to comply with federal reporting requirements.

Source: *South Dakota State University*

9a. Are you Hispanic or Latino?*

No, not Hispanic or Latino.

Yes, Hispanic or Latino: a person of Cuban, Mexican, Chicano, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race.

9b. What is your race? You may select one or more races.*

White: a person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa.

Black or African American: a person having origins in any of the black racial groups of Africa.

American Indian or Alaska Native: a person having origins in any of the original peoples of North America (including Central America), and who maintains tribal affiliation or community attachment.

Source: *Eastern Michigan University*

D. Prior Criminal History

Have you ever been charged with a violation of the law that resulted in probation, community service, a jail sentence, or the revocation or suspension of your driver's license? Yes** No

** Attach explanation and see How to Apply section.

Source: *Iowa State University*

Have you ever been convicted of, or entered a plea for, or do you have charges pending against you for, a crime other than a minor traffic violation?
 Yes No If yes, attach a statement of explanation.

Source: *George Washington University*

E. Signature Block

I hereby certify that I have personally filled out this form and that the information is complete and accurate. I understand that submission of incomplete or inaccurate information or documents may be grounds for denying or withdrawing an offer of admission or termination of enrollment if I have been admitted. I understand that all credentials submitted in support of this application become the property of the University and will not be returned. By submitting this application, I agree to abide by and be subject to the University's rules, regulations, and disciplinary code as stated in the University Bulletin and other publications.

Applicant's signature: _____

Date: _____

Source: *George Washington University*

I certify that the information given in this application is complete and accurate. I realize that my application cannot be reviewed until all requested credentials have been received by the Office of Admissions, that it is my responsibility to support these credentials and that concealment or misrepresentation of any college registration, academic or disciplinary record – both undergraduate and graduate – may cancel and nullify my application or admission. If accepted, I agree to comply with the regulations of the University and to pay all fees required. I understand that all credentials become the property of Barry University.

Signature _____

Date _____

Source: *Barry University*

APPENDIX B

I certify that I have read and understood all instructions accompanying this application and have answered all questions truthfully to the best of my knowledge. I understand that any misrepresentation or omission may be cause for denying admission or permission to register at any time. I understand that this application and all materials received in support of it become the property of New York University and will not be duplicated or returned to me for any reason. Furthermore, I understand that New York University reserves the right to deny admission or permission to register or require the withdrawal of any student at any time for any reason it considers sufficient, including scholarship, character, and personal conduct. I understand that this application may be superseded and that the University reserves the right to alter requirements or change deadlines.

Date: _____ Signature: _____

Source: *New York University*

III. Transcript Evaluation

A. Student Computed GPA

	Institution	CEEB Code	Dates attended	Degree awarded	Quality points	Credit hours	Cumulative GPA
1.							
2.							
3.							
4.							
5.							
6.							
7.							

Divide total quality points by total credit hours to calculate overall GPA. Be sure to use a 4.0 scale. **Total:** _____ ÷ _____ = _____

Please list coursework you have completed to satisfy prerequisites and calculate prerequisite GPA. If additional space is needed, use a blank sheet of paper. **YOU MUST INCLUDE ALL COURSES COMPLETED IN EACH CATEGORY.** Please convert all quarter hours to a semester hour basis when completing this form. You may convert quarter hours to semester hours by multiplying the quarter hours for each individual course by $\frac{2}{3}$ (.6666666667).

Institution	Dept Name and Course Number	Course Title	Semester and Year Taken	Quality points	Credit hours	Grade
Biology (2 courses minimum)						
Chemistry (4 courses minimum)						

APPENDIX B

Source: *Arcadia University, Forensic Science*



Request for Transcript

To Be Completed
by the Applicant:

LAST OR FAMILY NAME _____ FIRST _____ MIDDLE _____ MAIDEN OR OTHER _____
Social Security number: _____ School: _____
Dates of enrollment: _____ Degree and year: _____
I authorize the release of a transcript of my academic record to The George Washington University's:
 Columbian College of Arts and Sciences School of Business
 Elliott School of International Affairs School of Engineering and Applied Science
 Graduate School of Education and Human Development College of Professional Studies
I am applying to: _____ PROGRAM _____ DEGREE _____
Signature: _____ Date: _____
Address: _____
STREET _____
CITY _____ STATE/PROVINCE _____ ZIP/POSTAL CODE _____ COUNTRY _____

Registrar:

This person is applying for admission to The George Washington University. Please enclose form along with one transcript in an official university envelope addressed to the applicant. Seal the envelope; date and sign, stamp, or place your seal on the back flap; and return it.

Be sure to include instructions on how to interpret the transcript and an explanation of your grading system. If the transcript is not in English, include an English translation. If a copy of the student's academic record cannot be forwarded, please indicate the reasons. If your policy does not allow returning the sealed envelope to the applicant, please send it directly to the appropriate school at The George Washington University, Washington, DC 20052, and notify the applicant that you have done so.

----- CUT HERE -----



Request for Transcript

To Be Completed
by the Applicant:

LAST OR FAMILY NAME _____ FIRST _____ MIDDLE _____ MAIDEN OR OTHER _____
Social Security number: _____ School: _____
Dates of enrollment: _____ Degree and year: _____
I authorize the release of a transcript of my academic record to The George Washington University's:
 Columbian College of Arts and Sciences School of Business
 Elliott School of International Affairs School of Engineering and Applied Science
 Graduate School of Education and Human Development College of Professional Studies
I am applying to: _____ PROGRAM _____ DEGREE _____
Signature: _____ Date: _____
Address: _____
STREET _____
CITY _____ STATE/PROVINCE _____ ZIP/POSTAL CODE _____ COUNTRY _____

Registrar:

This person is applying for admission to The George Washington University. Please enclose form along with one transcript in an official university envelope addressed to the applicant. Seal the envelope; date and sign, stamp, or place your seal on the back flap; and return it.

Be sure to include instructions on how to interpret the transcript and an explanation of your grading system. If the transcript is not in English, include an English translation. If a copy of the student's academic record cannot be forwarded, please indicate the reasons. If your policy does not allow returning the sealed envelope to the applicant, please send it directly to the appropriate school at The George Washington University, Washington, DC 20052, and notify the applicant that you have done so.

APPENDIX B

IV. Letters of Reference



Recommendation Form



Please type or print legibly in black ink

TO THE APPLICANT

Complete the section below and provide your recommendation writer with a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

Applicant's name LAST _____ FIRST _____ MIDDLE _____ SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER _____

GW school to which candidate is applying: _____

Degree sought: master's doctoral other: _____ Field of study: _____

Applying for: fall spring summer Year: _____

In accordance with federal regulations, materials in student files, such as recommendation forms, are open to inspection upon request, unless the student has waived the right of access in advance. Please indicate your wish by completing and signing the statement below. Your right to review this form is considered waived if you do not check a response.

I (check one) DO DO NOT waive access to this recommendation

Applicant's signature: _____ Date: _____

Applicant's address: _____
STREET

CITY _____ STATE/PROVINCE _____ ZIP/POSTAL CODE _____ COUNTRY _____

TO THE RECOMMENDATION WRITER

This form should be returned in the envelope provided by the applicant; please seal it and sign across the seal. The applicant will forward the recommendation unopened to The George Washington University with his/her other application materials. We are aware of the time and care necessary to prepare this evaluation and gratefully acknowledge your assistance.

Name of individual completing this form: _____

Please compare the applicant with others you have known during your professional career. For each of the categories below, check the appropriate box.

	EXCELLENT	ABOVE AVERAGE	AVERAGE	BELOW AVERAGE	INADEQUATE OPPORTUNITY TO OBSERVE
Analytical ability					
Quantitative ability					
Research ability					
Command of field of study					
Written English					
Oral English					
Interpersonal skills					
Maturity					
Self-confidence					
Motivation					
Initiative					
Potential as a teacher (if applicable)					
Leadership potential					
<i>For School of Business applicants only:</i>					
Results-orientation					
Assertiveness					
Professional knowledge					

Overall impression of candidate: Outstanding Strong Average Fair Poor

APPENDIX B

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

In a separate letter, please address the following subjects:

1. How long have you known the applicant and under what circumstances?
2. What do you consider the applicant's most outstanding talents or characteristics?
3. What are the applicant's chief liabilities or weaknesses?
4. The admissions committee would appreciate any additional statement you may wish to make concerning the applicant's aptitude for advanced study or his/her potential for becoming a successful manager and leader, if appropriate.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Position/title: _____ Organization/institution: _____

Address: _____

Daytime telephone: _____ Fax: _____

E-mail: _____

APPENDIX B

Recommendation Form—*Confidential*

Note: If a program requires more than two recommendations (see catalog), please feel free to copy both sides of this form.

Graduate Programs

TO THE APPLICANT: Print or type your name and address below and give this form to a person (employer, supervisor, head of department, academic advisor, or one of your professors) who knows you well enough to evaluate your qualities and abilities. Provide that person with a stamped envelope addressed to: Barry University, Office of Admissions, 11300 N.E. 2nd Avenue, Miami Shores, FL 33161-6695.

Name _____ Social Security Number⁹ _____
Last First Middle

Address _____
Street City State ZIP

Program _____

FAMILY EDUCATIONAL RIGHTS AND PRIVACY ACT OF 1974: The purpose of this recommendation is to assist in making the admission decision and, if you are admitted and enroll, to aid in academic advising and otherwise assisting you. Under the provisions of the Act, you have the right, if you enroll at Barry, to review your educational records. The Act further provides that you may waive your right to see recommendations for admission. Please check the appropriate box indicating whether or not you wish to waive this right and sign your name.

I waive do not waive any right of access I may have to this recommendation form.

Signature

Date

TO THE RESPONDENT: The above-named person is applying to a graduate program at Barry University. You have been chosen by the applicant to aid us in the selection process by supplying an evaluation of his/her ability. We would appreciate it if you would comment briefly on the applicant's strengths and/or weaknesses as indicated below. *(Please print or type)*

1. I have known the applicant as an undergraduate student; a graduate student; other _____
2. I have known the applicant since _____, in my position as: _____

Please rate the applicant for each of the following characteristics by circling the appropriate point on the scale.

	No Basis	Very Low	Average	High	Very High
A. Motivation for academic work	0	1 2 3	4 5 6	7 8	9 10
B. Intellectual ability	0	1 2 3	4 5 6	7 8	9 10
C. Creativity	0	1 2 3	4 5 6	7 8	9 10
D. Breadth of general knowledge	0	1 2 3	4 5 6	7 8	9 10
E. Grasp of field	0	1 2 3	4 5 6	7 8	9 10
F. Oral expression	0	1 2 3	4 5 6	7 8	9 10
G. Written expression	0	1 2 3	4 5 6	7 8	9 10
H. Initiative	0	1 2 3	4 5 6	7 8	9 10
I. Resourcefulness	0	1 2 3	4 5 6	7 8	9 10
J. Emotional maturity	0	1 2 3	4 5 6	7 8	9 10
K. Cooperation	0	1 2 3	4 5 6	7 8	9 10
L. Promise as a researcher	0	1 2 3	4 5 6	7 8	9 10

APPENDIX B

3. Please provide other comments, related to the applicant's potential success in a graduate program, which you believe would be of importance to the graduate admissions committee.

4. I recommend this applicant:

<u>Not at all</u>	<u>Moderately</u>	<u>Enthusiastically</u>
1 2 3	4 5 6	7 8 9

Signature of the Respondent _____

Name _____ Date _____

Title _____ Phone (_____) _____ Ext. _____

Company/Institution _____

Address _____

Questions?: Call 305-899-3113 or 1-800-695-2279

Please mail form directly to:

BARRY
UNIVERSITY

DIVISION OF ENROLLMENT SERVICES

11300 NE Second Avenue
Miami Shores, FL 33161-6695

Office of Admissions: (305) 899-3113
Toll-free Admissions & Financial Aid: (800) 695-2279
Office of Financial Aid: (305) 899-3673

www.barry.edu/success

APPENDIX B

Please comment on the specific talents the applicant has demonstrated in research, writing or teaching. We also welcome comments concerning the applicant's academic, personal and professional qualities which reflect his/her ability to engage in graduate study. If you wish, you may attach a separate letter instead of using this form.

signature

date

title

Please return this form in a sealed envelope to the applicant. Please sign your name across the seal of the envelope. Thank you for completing this form according to our instructions.

APPENDIX B

V. Personal Statement

UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I AT MĀNOA GRADUATE PROGRAM STATEMENT OF OBJECTIVES FORM

If your intended graduate program requires a specific format or uses another form, follow your program's instructions. Otherwise, complete this form and submit it directly to your intended graduate program.

In the space provided below, describe the objectives of your graduate study, your area of specialization within the graduate program, and your long-range professional goals. Include any additional information that will assist the graduate admissions committee in evaluating your application.

Please type or print clearly. Semester FALL 2005 SPRING 2006

NAME OF APPLICANT _____ INTENDED GRADUATE PROGRAM _____

APPENDIX B

MARSHALL UNIVERSITY GRADUATE APPLICATION FOR ADMISSION

Page 3

Graduate College Information Sheet

Name: _____ MUID no. or
(Last, First, Middle) Social Security no. _____

Present Occupation: _____

If a teacher: Type of Certificate: _____

Years of Experience: _____
Elementary Middle School or Junior High High School

Undergraduate major: _____

Purpose of Graduate Work: Advanced Degree Teaching Certificate Renewal Graduate Certificate Other
(Click on one)

If other, describe: _____

Desired graduate major and
area of emphasis: _____
(Be specific, e.g., Counseling - School; Safety - Safety Management; Nursing - Nursing Education)

List names and addresses of three persons who know of your academic record and qualifications for graduate study.
If letters of recommendation are required by your major, you must request that they be submitted to the University.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

To what honorary or professional organizations do you belong? -- Please enter no more than 6 lines. --

Additional Information -- Experience pertinent to your proposed major, your professional goals, etc. (This is in addition to
any personal statements or writing samples required by many majors.) -- Please enter no more than 15 lines. --

I affirm that the statements made herein are true and correct to the best of my knowledge.

Date

Signature

