

University of California, Berkeley
Freshman Admissions Policy
Fall 2017

Background

This document represents the first major revision of the freshman admissions policy since 2002. Since then, the admissions landscape has changed radically, with the increase in the number of applications far outstripping the increase in available admission slots. As a result, the university is facing the challenge of having too few spots for too many highly qualified applicants. Since 2009, the university has transitioned to admitting a significant percentage of its freshmen from out-of-state. As Berkeley has become more selective in its undergraduate admissions, it has become imperative that processes allow for higher resolution and greater flexibility in assessing the applicants' qualifications, reaching beyond the UC mandated application data. In the context of these changes, it is important to reaffirm the centrality of holistic review as the organizing tool for the review of applications.

Holistic review

The admissions process honors academic achievement and also recognizes a wide range of talent and creativity that constitutes positive indicators of the student's ability to thrive at Berkeley and contribute to the university's mandate for excellence and access. In developing this document, the Committee recognizes the following principles of holistic review:

- Continued refinement of the concept of merit to reflect the full range of an applicant's academic and personal achievements and prospective contributions to the Berkeley community, viewed in the context of the opportunities and challenges that the applicant has faced.
- Individualized review and analysis of each applicant's full available record of achievement, including all evidence contained in the application form, the total available high school record, letters of recommendation (if requested), and the personal statement, as well as any supplementary information the campus may seek in order to clarify information provided in the application.
- Continued commitment to avoiding categorical approaches to the evaluation of academic and personal accomplishments and characteristics, as well as specific weights for particular criteria.
- Continued commitment to the goal of achieving academic excellence as well as diversity of talents and abilities, personal experience, and backgrounds in the members of the freshman class.

Guiding Principles For Freshman Admissions

Berkeley's freshman selection criteria and process are based on the following fundamental principles:

1. The admissions process accords priority to students of outstanding academic accomplishment. At the same time, the decision-making process employs a broad and multifaceted definition of merit, including an assessment of contributions that a student is expected to make to the intellectual, cultural, or co-curricular aspects of campus life.
2. Each applicant will be judged individually and comprehensively and all achievements will be evaluated in the context in which the student learned and lived, as well as the opportunities available to the student and how he or she responded to challenges. In keeping with Berkeley's status as a public institution, ability to pay fees and expenses will never be a criterion in the admission decision.
3. The admissions process will further the Regents' Policy that each campus should enroll a student body that "encompasses the broad diversity of backgrounds characteristic of California." The process will also comport with state law, including Proposition 209.
4. The admissions process will select only those students whose academic preparation suggests a strong likelihood that they will graduate.
5. No preference in the admissions process will be given to applicants whose relatives are alumni of, employees of, or donors to Berkeley or the University of California.

Freshman Selection Criteria

As described above, the purpose of the admissions process is to identify those applicants who, based on a review of all of the information—both academic and non-academic—presented in their applications, most highly merit admission to Berkeley and will make the greatest contribution to Berkeley's intellectual and cultural community. The admissions evaluation will reflect the reader's thoughtful consideration of the full spectrum of the applicant's qualifications, based on all evidence provided in the application, and viewed in the context of the applicant's academic and personal circumstances and the overall strength of the Berkeley applicant pool. The criteria on which this evaluation will be based are as follows:

1. The applicant's full record of achievement in college preparatory work during high school, including the number and rigor of courses taken and GPA (weighted and unweighted) earned from those courses. Consideration will be given to completion of courses beyond the University of California's minimum coursework requirement; strength of the senior year course load; and performance in honors, college-level, Advanced Placement, and International Baccalaureate (IB) courses, to the extent

that such courses are available to the applicant. In assessing achievement levels, consideration will be given to individual grades earned, to the pattern of achievement over time, and to an applicant's achievement relative to that of others in his or her high school. Where available, the school profile, provided by the high school as a supplement, will be a resource to place the achievement of the applicants in context.

2. Personal qualities of the applicant, including love of learning, leadership (in school, family, or community), persistence in the face of challenges, cross-cultural engagement, originality/creativity, and demonstrated concern for others.
3. Performance on standardized tests, including the required SAT reasoning test (or ACT with writing), and any optional SAT subject tests, Advanced Placement, or IB examinations the applicant may have taken.

Test scores will be evaluated in the context of all other academic and personal information in the application. Substantial disparity between SAT or ACT scores and other indicators will trigger additional scrutiny in the review process. Also, documented imprecision and other known weaknesses of standardized tests will be taken into account.

Applicants who have not had the opportunity to take Advanced Placement (AP) or IB courses or who have chosen not to take the examinations for these courses will not be disadvantaged. Conversely, for applicants who have ready access to AP courses, taking an unusually large number of AP examinations will not be a deciding factor in admissions.

4. Supplemental evaluation, in the form of two letters of recommendation, requested from a subset of applicants. One may come from any referee of the applicant's choice, but at least one must come from a teacher who has taught the applicant in an academic course. The letters should address the applicant's academic and non-academic qualities.
5. Achievement in academic enrichment programs, including but not limited to those sponsored by the University of California. This criterion will be measured by time and depth of participation, by the academic progress made by the applicant during that participation, and by the intellectual rigor of the particular program.
6. Other evidence of achievement. This criterion will recognize exemplary, sustained achievement in any field of intellectual or creative endeavor; extraordinary accomplishments in the performing arts, creative arts, or athletics; and sustained local, national, military, or international service. The admission of applicants with special athletic talent is described in detail in the Student-Athlete Admissions Policy document.

Both academic and non-academic achievement will be considered in the context of the opportunities an applicant has had, any hardships or unusual circumstances the applicant has faced, and the ways in which he or she has responded to them. In evaluating the context in which academic accomplishments have taken place, evaluators will consider the strength of the high school curriculum, including the availability of honors and Advanced Placement courses and the total number of college preparatory courses available, among other indicators of the resources available within the school. When appropriate and feasible, they will look comparatively at the achievements of applicants in the same pool who attended the same high school and therefore might be expected to have similar opportunities and challenges. These qualities may be illuminated in the letters of recommendation in the applicants' files. The evaluators will also consider other contextual factors that bear directly on the applicant's achievement, including parental education level, whether English is the primary language spoken at home, and other indicators of support available at home.

Freshman Admissions Recommendation Guidelines

The purpose of the application review process is to identify successful applicants according to the Freshman Selection Criteria. The new guidelines are a departure from the numerical scoring of applications, which worked well in an environment where the application pool did not significantly increase in size from year to year. The ongoing dramatic growth in the size of the applicant pool has occasioned the need for a new approach. In addition, the new guidelines begin to adopt a strategy of building a class, which allows input from academic disciplines in the admissions process. These guidelines also take the first step toward matching student interests and available campus capacity.

The recommendation to admit or not to admit represents the reader's judgment of the applicants' relative level of achievement in both academic and non-academic areas. Applicants who receive a particular recommendation may exhibit quite different patterns of achievement across various dimensions if, in the judgment of the reader, those differing patterns nonetheless equate to a similar overall level of achievement when compared to all other Berkeley applicants and viewed in the applicant's context. The three possible recommendations are "Yes," "Possible," and "No."

1. "Yes" recommendation

This recommendation should be given to outstanding applicants, who have distinguished themselves across multiple academic and non-academic criteria described in this document. Applicants who receive the "Yes" recommendation shall comprise about 65% of all freshmen admission offers. The top 10% of this group should be nominated for the Regents' and Chancellor's Scholarship. Identification of this group should be based on exceptional achievement that goes beyond the normal expectations of a successful Berkeley student.

2. "Possible" recommendation

This recommendation should be given to applicants who have demonstrated clear promise of success at Berkeley, but who have not shown the same degree of

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outstanding accomplishment as the applicants in the “Admit” category. Applicants who are recommended for “Possible” shall comprise about 35% of all freshmen admission offers. The “Possible” rating will be given to a cohort of approximately twice the number of students that will ultimately be admitted from this group. The process of reaching admissions decisions for applicants recommended for “Possible” is described in the Freshman Selection Procedures document.

3. “No” recommendation

This recommendation shall be given to applicants whose overall level of achievement is not sufficiently high relative to the rest of the applicant pool to warrant admission.

Approved by the Admissions, Enrollment, and Preparatory Education Committee on 09/16/16.