

# **Overview of Holistic Admissions in the UW System**

## **Executive Summary**

### **Background**

The University of Wisconsin System is committed to providing educational opportunities of the highest quality for all citizens. Over the years, it has made a strong, public commitment to diversity, in recognition of diversity as one of the critical components of the educational excellence needed to prepare students for an increasingly diverse workforce and society. The UW System defines diversity broadly, to include and acknowledge differing personal characteristics, experiences, and talents as well as social and cultural differences such as gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, age, nationality, religion, physical ability, and sexual orientation.

Recent Supreme Court decisions have mandated that race-conscious admissions policies must consider students applying for admissions utilizing a holistic review that considers race, extracurricular activities, work and life experiences, and other factors in addition to traditional factors such as grade point average, class rank, and test scores. These cases provide colleges and universities with guidance on how admissions policies and practices should be structured to ensure the constitutionality of race-conscious admissions. They are also founded on the understanding, backed by decades of research, that numerous educational and social benefits flow from a diversified student body and university community.

In the wake of these Supreme Court decisions, the UW System Admissions Advisory Group was formed in April 2005, to review the UW System undergraduate admissions process, and to recommend guidelines and models to assist UW institutions in their efforts to serve a diverse population of students and thereby enhance the educational experience of all students. In February 2006, the committee issued to the President of the UW System a report that included among its recommendations that each institution conduct a holistic admissions review process, which includes an individualized, non-mechanical review of applicants considering a broad range of quantitative and qualitative factors. That report and its recommendations are included here.

### **Requested Action**

The purpose of this report is to provide information on holistic admissions in the UW System. No specific action is requested at this time.

### **Discussion**

Admissions requirements in the UW System center on a systemwide admissions policy established by the Board of Regents, which permits individual campus requirements and processes developed in accordance with the select mission of each institution. The Board of

Regents policy is characterized as a flexible admissions policy in recognition of the diverse needs of the state's population and the Board's commitment to make educational opportunity accessible to all citizens of the state. In response to this commitment to maximize educational access for all Wisconsin residents, including under-represented students of color, the UW System has used race-conscious admissions policies.

In order to help UW institutions develop or modify their own practices for holistic review of applicants for admission, UW System Administration convened a workshop in March 2006, at which representatives of all of the UW System's campuses received information and engaged in discussion on the equity, educational, and legal issues surrounding admissions, and on how to conduct a more holistic review of applicants. In the wake of that workshop, each campus is currently reviewing its admissions process to determine whether modifications need to be made to ensure that applicants are considered pursuant to an individual, full-file review (i.e. holistic review). Any revisions to campus admissions procedures will be completed in early fall, 2006, and will be implemented for students applying for the 2008-09 academic year. Information to students will be provided in the form of University publications and discussions with admissions and high school counselors during the 2006-07 academic year. As recommended by the final report, each UW institution will establish a process and timeline for regular assessment of its admissions review to ensure that each campus is effectively meeting its institutional diversity goals and in compliance with legal requirements. The Board of Regents will hear an update on the holistic review of admissions in 2006-07.

## **Conclusion**

The holistic process to be followed by UW System institutions is designed to align the Board's commitment to a quality education that serves all segments of Wisconsin's population, with all legal requirements. The outcome will be the admission of students who are prepared for success in the UW System, who will contribute to a quality intellectual and social experience for all students, in preparation for their lives as citizens in an increasingly diverse world.

The mid-point report on *Plan 2008: Educational Quality through Racial and Ethnic Diversity*, made to the UW System Board of Regents in April 2004, stated the following:

*In the end, diversity must be viewed as a societal, indeed an American imperative that plays a critical role in developing an educated citizenry dedicated to strengthening democracy and advancing equal opportunity for all people. The UW System's mission goes beyond servicing the individual entitlement to an education. The System exists to advance the public good and invest in the human resources that will lead Wisconsin and the nation into the future.*

The UW System remains committed to this mission. The holistic review of applicants for admission to UW System institutions is an integral part of fulfilling it.

## **Related Policies**

None.