

**UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, DAVIS
AUDIT & MANAGEMENT ADVISORY SERVICES**

**Division of Student Affairs
Undergraduate Admissions
Student Admissions by Exception**

Audit & Management Advisory Services Project #16-07

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Fieldwork Performed by:

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Background

The University of California (UC) has specified eligibility requirements for undergraduate admissions and enrollment. These freshman (first-year) requirements are: completion of mandated “a-g” college-preparatory coursework, a minimum grade point average (GPA) of 3.0 for California residents (3.40 GPA for non-residents), and completion of either the ACT Plus Writing or the SAT Reasoning Test. While these requirements are intended to ensure that only the most qualified students are admitted to UC campuses, UC recognizes that some of the most highly qualified applicants may not strictly meet these requirements due to adverse or unusual circumstances. To address this concern, UC developed the admission by exception (ABE) policy, which allows UC campuses to admit students who fail to satisfy the strict eligibility requirements, yet who demonstrate a strong likelihood of success at UC and the ability to contribute to the campus. The UC Board of Admissions and Relations with Schools (BOARS) maintains that ABE is valuable because of its potential to provide an important access path for students with outstanding academics, talents or achievements in particular areas, as well as those from non-traditional schools or disadvantaged educational or socio-economic backgrounds.

In 1991, BOARS established an ABE policy that allocated up to 6% per year of new freshman and up to 6% per year of new transfer enrollment to be admitted via ABE. In 1994 BOARS recommended policy, as specified in Regents’ policy, that campuses limit ABE enrollment to a maximum of 6% of each of the first-year freshman and transfer enrolled classes. Within the 6% cap, up to 4% of enrollment is reserved for students from low socio-economic backgrounds, first-generation or who have experienced limited educational opportunities. The remaining 2% of students may be granted ABE for other reasons, such as having attended a nontraditional high school or having demonstrated exceptional talent or academic skills.

At times, the public and the media have expressed a concern regarding potential unfairness or abuse in the ABE process. This includes a fear that UC campuses might admit unauthorized numbers of students because they exhibit extraordinary athletic talent, and a fear that admissions decisions may benefit undeserving applicants as a result of undue influence.

At UC Davis, Undergraduate Admissions (UA) received approximately 65,000 freshman applications for fall 2015 and made approximately 25,000 offers of admission. Out of the 25,000 offers, approximately 22% of those students accepted, and 5,369 first-year freshmen enrolled at UC Davis. From this incoming class, seven students were admitted despite eligibility deficiencies via the admission by exception policy. This handful of students represents approximately .001% of the total number of freshmen enrolled in fall 2015, which falls far below the percentage requirements as outlined in the BOARS and UC Regents Policy.

Scope and Audit Work Performed

As part of the audit plan for fiscal year 2016, Audit and Management Advisory Services (AMAS) conducted a review of UA's internal controls over the admission of students by exception. The scope of the audit included undergraduate admissions and covered the admission cycle for new first-year students admitted in fall 2015.

AMAS interviewed the Associate Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs, the Director of Evaluation & Advising Services, and the Executive Director of UA to understand the ABE process and identify relevant controls.

Fieldwork included documentation and verification of the adequacy of controls used by UA in identifying ineligible applicants and admitting them by exception. Information gathered in interviews with UA management was used to define a class of admitted students for which eligibility deficiencies were more likely to have been overlooked. This allowed AMAS to judgmentally select a group of 250 new first-year students from fall 2015, and test their application materials for eligibility. Testing included a review of final high school transcripts to verify that college-preparatory coursework, GPA, and examination requirements were met.

Additionally, similar procedures were performed to determine whether the seven ABE students in the fall 2015 class were properly admitted in accordance with UC Regents Policy and BOARS guidelines.

Conclusion

Our results determined that:

- A separation of duties in the final ABE decision making process prevents undue influence; the Director of Evaluation & Advising Services and the Executive Director properly confer in making final determinations.
- All of the 250 applicants tested were properly classified as eligible.
- The number of applicants who were granted ABE did not exceed the limits established by UC Regents Policy, and AMAS agrees with UA that each individual who was granted ABE demonstrated significant potential to contribute to the campus community at UC Davis.

The results of the audit work performed demonstrate that UA maintains effective controls to ensure compliance with UC Regents Policy, and follows BOARS recommendations when admitting students by exception.

For these reasons, AMAS commends UA for its effective controls and makes no recommendations to alter its processes.
