

Recommendations of the Admission Standards Review Committee

March 26, 2001

Committee Members

The Admission Standards Committee was originally convened in February of 1999 and was co-chaired by Vice President for Academic Affairs Dr. Barbara Chapman and Vice President for Student Affairs Dr. Daniel Burcham. The committee included Margaret H Avritt, Gregory W Denny, Terrence J Doyle, Raymond L Gant, David J Hanna, Maryanne Heidemann, Gregory W Key, Matthew Klein, Cynthia K Konrad, Rebecca L Kowalkoski, Carol L Maki, Donald E Mullens, Thomas E Oldfield, Ramon Robinson, Fred Swartz, Joan E Totten, Robert von der Osten and Philip E Walling.

Committee Charge

The charge of the committee was to assess Ferris State's current admission standards and explore the role admission standards have in maintaining a strong, positive learning environment where abundant student success is the norm. The committee was asked to review existing reports, receive input from various constituents and engage in "what-if" analyses. The committee's findings were expected to be tempered by two important questions:

1. What benefits and risks are associated with no change in admission standards?
2. What benefits and risks are associated with higher admission standards?

Introduction

The admission standards proposed in this set of recommendations were written with a clear purpose to uphold the historical mission of Ferris State University while being educationally and fiscally reasonable and responsible. These recommendations were developed after reviewing years of data on students' academic readiness and performance as determined by the ACT tests, students' high school grades, college grade point averages, retention rates and graduation rates. These data suggest that education is no longer an opportunity when a student is so poorly prepared that he or she cannot benefit from the services available. The recommendations in this document reflect this conclusion. Ferris State can continue to offer enrollment to more students than other colleges would admit but the readiness level of these students must meet a minimum standard that makes the enrollment a genuine opportunity and the hope for success a realistic one. In the words of our founding father "the opportunity is for those that are willing to work hard"—not for everyone.

Committee Goals

The recommendations that have been set out in this report seek to accomplish three goals for Ferris State University:

1. To protect the historical integrity of the Ferris mission while improving the academic climate of the university community.

2. To improve the academic readiness of our first-year and transfer students leading to improved classroom performance and increased retention and graduation rates.
3. To establish academic standards that more appropriately reflect the serious work of our academic community and our goal to be a national leader in career, technical and professional education.

The committee recognizes in making these recommendations the risks that come when altering long held practices. These recommendations attempt to be both cautious and future focused. The competition for highly qualified students is greater than it has ever been and our university can not ignore this fact if it is to grow and thrive in the decade ahead. The views that students and their parents have of prospective institutions are strongly influenced by the academic reputation of the institution and the perceived rigor of their academic offerings (Noel/Levitz 1999). Students (and parents) view colleges that set high academic standards as being better able to prepare them for the challenges of a global marketplace.

In making recommendations to raise admission standards the committee also provided an opportunity for students that do not meet the recommended standards to still enter the university. These students may be admitted into our University College where they will receive academic assistance designed to prepare them to meet the academic standards of the university. This opportunity is similar to those of many universities that have bridge programs or emerging scholars programs.

Finally, the committee is aware that these recommendations may, in the short run, reduce enrollments in some programs and /or colleges (see Appendix A). The committee believes that any declines will be short in duration and that the university needs to be prepared to support these programs during this time of adjustment. However, it is also believed that Ferris will continue to improve its ability to recruit more academically qualified students (1999 and 2000 freshman admits had a mean ACT composite of 19.6 an increase of .5 over 1998 freshman) thus reducing the number of students (currently being projected using 1999 numbers) that would be denied program admission by a rise in admission standards. Finally, additional resources may be needed for the University College to handle the students that will enter the UC to prepare themselves to meet the academic standards of the university.

Recommendation 1

Establish new admission standards beginning fall semester 2002. These standards would include requiring all students as a condition of admission to complete the ACT test and earn a minimum ACT composite score or minimum high school grade point average in order to be admitted to a degree-granting program. The initial level of these new standards would require either an ACT composite score of 15 or a high school grade point average of 2.25 (on a 4.0 scale). Students meeting the minimum ACT composite standard must have earned at least a 2.0 high school GPA. The ACT requirements being recommended would not apply to international students and nontraditional students aged 23 and older.

This recommendation would require a change in the current admission policy for new students by requiring all students to complete the ACT test prior to being granted admission to Ferris State and would allow students to demonstrate they meet program entrance requirements either by earning a specified high school GPA or by having an ACT composite score that meets the prescribed standard for the university. The exceptions made for international and nontraditional students reflects the limited predictive value the ACT tests has for both of these populations.

Currently the university admission policy requires only a high school GPA of 2.00 or better for regular program admission (10 programs have higher GPA requirements-see appendix B). The university uses ACT scores for admission in only selected programs (33 programs have ACT math minimum requirements of 19 or higher-see appendix B.1). The university also has a provisional admission for students under a 2.00 high school GPA.

This change in the admissions policy **would not automatically prohibit students failing to meet the program admission standards from entering the university.** These students **may** be offered admission into the Collegiate Skills Program provided their high school GPA is between a 2.0 and 2.24 and they have a minimum ACT composite score of 13 (see recommendation 3). This provision of these recommendations assures the historical integrity of the Ferris mission will be maintained.

Further, in order to maintain Ferris State's role as a community college for its local residents the committee recommends that the university offer admission to students in Mecosta and the four counties surrounding Big Rapids that fail to meet the minimum standards (a 2.0 and a 13 ACT composite) but only as special admits into a preparatory program during summer semester.

Impact on Enrollment

The establishment of new admission standards will be done carefully, slowly and with a clear goal of benefiting the academic programs of the university. Based on 1999 fall enrollment data, this new admission recommendation would have prohibited 84 students (see appendix A) from entering their programs. Of these 84 students, 59% or 50 students would have been minority students with the great majority of these being African American students. (See Appendix H)

There would be some immediate positive benefits of implementing this modest new standard including an increase in the level of academic performance as indicated by the winter 1997, fall 1997, and winter 1998 semester grade reports (see appendix C).

Establishing the entrance requirements recommended in this report would, over the next several years, help improve the image of Ferris State University. Research from Noel/Levitz and others indicates that an institution's academic image is a major determinant for students when choosing which college to attend.

Problems with H.S. GPA

Current research suggests that grade inflation within high schools is commonplace (Ziomek and Svec 1995). The continued use of the current 2.0 GPA as a meaningful measure of program readiness must be seriously questioned.

Data gathered by Ferris's Office of Assessment Services from fall 1994 to fall 1999 indicates between 38 and 42% percent of Ferris students with 17 or fewer credit hours earn less than a 2.0 (each semester) in their college courses. In addition, Ferris's attrition data suggest that students with ACT composite scores in the low-14 range and students with high school GPA's below 2.5 are at significantly greater risk for attrition and academic denial (see appendix D).

Dr. Alexander Astin from the Center for Research in Higher Education at UCLA has written **that the most significant factor in student retention is the academic quality of the students an institution admits** (Astin 1993). Based on this finding, the proposed admission standards will likely increase student retention.

Non-Cognitive Admission Factors

The committee recognized that the reliance on only a high school GPA of 2.0 as the single indicator to predict student success is clearly problematic. In recommending a system that steadily increases the levels of high school grade point averages or ACT composite scores used when making admission decisions, (which is recommended in this document) the committee seeks to significantly increase the likelihood of academic success for entering first year students. The committee is aware that some elite and highly selective colleges use noncognitive indicators such as the Non Cognitive Questionnaire (NCQ), written essays or portfolios to aid in making admission decisions. However, with students with very low high school GPA's and ACT composite scores it is difficult for the committee to recommend the use of non-cognitive factors. The committee was unable to find any research that would support that even a superior attitude or a high level of motivation would be adequate to overcome the skills and background deficiencies indicated by such low grades and test scores as those being targeted for non admission. In addition, noncognitive factors are usually non-standardized and can be difficult to interpret accurately.

Recommendation 2

Gradually increase Freshman admissions standards every two years for a five-year period, beginning with a 16 ACT or a 2.35 high school GPA in 2004, and ending with an 18 ACT composite or a high school GPA of 2.7 in 2008.

This recommendation needs to be coupled with a yearly review of the first-year students admitted and retained from one fall to the next. If these numbers do not meet the projected enrollment numbers needed by the university the increase in admission standards can be delayed until projected enrollment numbers are met. This plan to gradually increase admission standards will be slowly and carefully administered with sensitivity to the enrollment needs of the academic programs. If future enrollment data warrants, selected programs may request to make exceptions to the above recommendations.

It is important to note that an internet search in the spring of 1999 of other colleges and universities that have recently raised admission standards revealed that several of the universities had enrollments increase following the raising of admission standards (Office of Institutional Research, 1999).

The gradual increase in admission standards will result in an academically more successful student community (see appendix C), and student retention and graduation rates can be expected to rise as well. (Astin 1993). The proposed admission standards by year of implementation can be found in appendix E of these recommendations.

The number of students (using 1999 enrollment data) who would be **ineligible** for program or degree admission (both below the ACT composite and the GPA requirement) ranges from 78 in 2003 to 202 in 2007 (see appendix A.1). **These students may be offered admission into the University College where they would receive the academic assistance needed to prepare them for entry into their chosen program or degree.** It is expected that many of these students would be prepared to enroll in their chosen program or degree after one or two semesters in the University College. The specific academic improvement standards that these students would need to meet have yet to be determined but would be similar to those currently in place for Collegiate Skills students.

Recommendation 3

A review of the current Collegiate Skills Program should be undertaken to ensure its readiness to serve as the opportunity program for students who do not meet the new Ferris admission standards.

The committee **does not seek** to move far away from the historic mission of Ferris State University. However, the current first-year to second-year attrition rate of 41 % (fall 2000) is a reflection of enrolling too many first-year students who are academically underprepared (see appendix D). Most of these students are attempting to begin their program of study without the skills they need to be successful. By enrolling these students in University College where they would be provided the academic, social and emotional support they need to be successful, the institution would continue to meet its mission and better serve its students.

The University College faculty and administration would be charged with undertaking the review of the Collegiate Skills Program with consultation from all of the undergraduate colleges. The goal would be to provide academic support while maintaining a linkage for students with the colleges and programs that they seek to enter.

Students with HS GPA's of less than 2.0 will be offered summer admission (second session). Successful completion of this summer semester will allow the students to be admitted to the Collegiate Skills Program.

Recommendation 4

In degree areas where current admission standards are higher than the minimums being proposed the higher standards would be maintained.

In all programs and degree areas where specific admission standards currently exist that exceed the standards being proposed, those programs or degree areas would maintain their entrance standards. Students that meet the minimum admission standard of the university but fall short of the individual program requirements would be given admission to the university. A plan as to what program(s) these students would be entered into and what academic and advising support services they would receive needs to be determined by each individual college (most colleges have pre-programs already in place).

The committee's recommendations are focused on raising admission standards for programs that currently use a GPA of 2.00 to 2.24 and do not use ACT composite scores, **not in altering existing program standards** that already exceed these standards. As standards are gradually increased, all programs will need to meet or exceed the minimum standards that are being proposed. Appendix B of these recommendations lists the programs that currently exceed the 2002 proposed admission standards.

Recommendation 5

That the university re-commits itself to improving first-to second-year student retention.

Since Ferris undertook its aggressive marketing plan to recruit better prepared students and implemented many of the retention recommendations of the Retention Task Force first to second year student retention has risen by 7% over the past five years (1995-1999). This movement while in the right direction however, still leaves much work to be done. The newly proposed standards, even when fully implemented, will not change the academic readiness make up of the freshman class so significantly as to do away with concerns about retention. For the current students and those enrolling in the next several

years, nearly one-half will need significant academic and social-emotional support to be successful.

The committee recommends that the Structured Learning Assistance program, with its proven record of success, be significantly expanded, especially in courses at the 100 and 200 level. Further, it recommends that all students who are required to enter the University College because they were unable to meet the admission standards of their program enroll in a minimum of two SLA courses during their first semester. The cost of implementing this recommendation would be approximately \$30,000 provided these were courses where the faculty taught multiple sections of the same course.

The committee also recommends that all new-to-college freshmen (FTIAC's) be required to enroll in a transition to college course, FSUS 100 Ferris State University Seminar. This orientation course has proven to increase retention in many of the 200 institutions nationwide where it is being used. The cost of implementing this requirement would be an additional \$16,875 over the current expenditure of \$46,000. In addition, the committee recommends that all first-year students who were unable to meet their program or degree entry requirements enroll in UNIV 103, a three-credit transition to college course. The cost of this recommendation would be approximately \$8,000.

The Collegiate Skills Program, as stated earlier in this report would be reviewed and renamed to insure that the program's operation is congruent with the most current research on the best ways to offer academic support to students who are academically at-risk. This may include a summer bridge program. The cost of such a program is currently undetermined. There is no additional cost expected for the general revision of CSP.

Finally, the committee believes that the university needs to put a renewed emphasis on the importance of academic advising by having faculty participate in advising update workshops on a three year rotated basis beginning with one-third of the faculty in the 2001-2002 academic year. In this way every faculty member can keep his or her skills and information up to date. These workshops can be provided by the Center for Teaching, Learning and Faculty Development or by the educational counselors.

Recommendation 6

Students transferring to Ferris with fewer than 12 college credits will be required to meet the same entrance standards as freshmen seeking admission to degree granting programs.

Students who have completed less than one full semester of college work (11 or fewer credits) do not have enough evidence of collegiate academic success to outweigh the use of ACT and GPA as admission criteria. The committee believes in general that a student's ACT composite score and a four-year high school GPA are better predictors of their academic readiness than a few college courses. However, in cases where the college work is in academically rigorous courses (100 level and above excluding developmental and physical education activity courses) and the grades earned are 2.0 or better the

committee believes the admission staff should consider this work in making their recommendation for admission.

Recommendation 7

For the purpose of advising only, require ACT scores or completion of placement tests for transfer students, international students and nontraditional students, with twelve (12) to twenty nine credit hours prior to admitting them into a degree granting program.

A student seeking to transfer with 12 or more 100 level college credits (excluding developmental course work and physical education activity courses) should be admitted based on their college GPA (2.0 or higher). However, students having earned 12 to 29 semester credits may not have taken a college English or algebra course, nor have enough college level courses completed to clearly determine whether they need academic support courses or other academic support services (SLA courses). Therefore, ACT scores or placement tests are necessary to aid in the assessment of their academic course placement and to offer them effective academic advising.

Currently, most transfer, international and nontraditional students are not required to report ACT scores to the admissions office. Requiring placement tests for math reading and English will aid advisors in making correct course placement

Recommendation 8

Require all students in degree granting programs with less than 30 credit hours to demonstrate college readiness competency in reading, English and mathematics before completing 36 credit hours.

In addition to raising the admission standards as a means of increasing the overall academic quality of the student population, the committee recommends that students be required to demonstrate minimum college readiness skills in the basic areas of math, reading and English. Students entering the university beginning in the fall of 2002 would need to meet this requirement.

This type of assessment can take many forms from meeting minimum scores on the ACT test to completion of improvement courses to competency tests. Many institutions nationwide use minimum college readiness competencies. A draft of a plan for implementation can be examined in appendix F of these recommendations.

The committee believes that requiring basic competencies is one more important tool that can be used to increase student performance and increase student retention. The cost of implementing this recommendation will primarily be for offering reading services. Since the university already has English and math requirements and has courses in place to help students meet these requirements, reading would be the one area where additional classes

may be needed to assist students in meeting this requirement. It is estimated that an additional 6-10 sections of UNIV 106 may be needed to support this recommendation.

Currently, students can delay enrolling in their English and math courses (and avoid reading courses their entire academic career) until they are juniors or seniors. The result of this practice is that the benefits of the basic skills courses, which are designed to aid students' success at FSU, are negated. This recommendation will stop this practice from happening by requiring students to demonstrate competency before they complete 36 credit hours.

Recommendation 9

Increase efforts to recruit students that meet the newly proposed admission standards, especially students that will help to maintain the diversity of our student community, in order to limit the impact of any possible declines in enrollment of first-year students due to new admissions standards.

Under the newly proposed admission standards (based on fall 1999 enrollment data) there would be an overall decline in the number of students being admitted to their academic program or degree areas of 4.5 percent in 2002. However, only three academic programs would suffer a decline of more than three students with 73% of the programs experiencing no decline. By 2008 the decline would increase to 11 percent with 58.2 percent of the programs still experiencing no decline in enrollment (see appendix G for a listing by program of the number of students that would be denied program admission). Among majority students the average decline ranges from 2.3 percent in 2002 to 9.6% in 2008. Among the Native American, Hispanic, African American and Asian students the decline ranges from 12.1 percent in 2002 to 16.4% in 2008, with the great majority being African Americans (see appendix H).

The committee is very concerned that every effort be made to maintain the diversity of our campus community. The fact that students will not be allowed to enter their academic program or degree area does not mean that they will not be admitted to Ferris State (see recommendation 3). It is difficult for the committee to predict exactly what the decline in the number of students enrolling in the university might be based on these new recommendations. However, a small decline is expected and the decline will disproportionately affect African American students. Therefore, the committee recommends that the university continue to aggressively recruit African American students using scholarships and other appropriate means in order to maintain or increase the current percentage of the African Americans at Ferris State. One effective way would be use the Detroit Public Schools Scholarship Program that in 2000 significantly increased the number of minority students attending FSU from the Detroit area.

The committee also recommends that specific recruitment efforts be targeted towards those degree granting programs with the greatest losses in enrollment (see appendix A.1), including the use of scholarships to boost the number of students in these program areas.

Recommendation 10

The committee recommends that admission to Ferris State University of first time college students that do not qualify for direct admission to their degree program would end twenty one days prior to the beginning of fall and winter semesters.

This recommendation is based on data that indicates academically underprepared students (students that would not qualify for direct program admission) that enter FSU during the 21 day period prior to the beginning of fall or winter semester have retention rates well below those of students that enter at all other times. In addition, because these students often arrive without ACT scores and high school transcripts that are needed to accurately place them in the skill improvement courses and they are scheduling at a time when many of the skill improvement and SLA courses are already filled they are even at greater risk for failure. The number of students that would be affected by this recommendation based on **1999 enrollment figures is less than ten students.** These students may be offered admission for the following semester or may have their individual files review by admissions for consideration for immediate admission to a pre-program or a probationary program in University College if special circumstances exist.

Recommendation 11

Establish a University-wide class attendance policy in all 100 level courses.

The committee strongly recommends that the university develop a class attendance policy that would require first-year students (and all other students) enrolled in 100 level courses to regularly attend class. The basis of this recommendation comes from both national studies and internal Ferris studies (SLA program studies) that clearly show a positive correlation between regular class attendance and better academic performance. The Ferris Office of Institutional Research and Testing has on many occasions released reports that establish the relationship between better academic performance and higher student retention. Further, the committee recommends that the established model used in the SLA Program be examined as a potential model for the 100 level attendance policy as it already has seven years of data showing the effectiveness of the attendance model. (See appendix I for description of SLA program attendance policy)

Recommendation 12

Establish an action team to facilitate the implementation of these recommendations.

The committee believes that a small action team needs to be formed that can receive feedback from the campus community on these recommendations and then take appropriate action to implement these recommendations. The entire academic community needs to be consulted and advised as the plans for implementing these recommendations are formed