

Research Update

Office of Institutional Research and Planning

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Characteristics of Fall Term 2008 First-time Freshmen Admitted under the New GPA Requirement

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In Fall Term 2004, the high school GPA requirement for freshman admission was increased from 2.5 to 3.0 to more closely reflect the actual entering GPAs of freshmen at PSU. For those students who do not meet the requirement, a special admissions process was made available. At the time the change took effect, questions were raised about how it might affect the composition of the entering freshman class. The Office of Institutional Research and Planning has conducted an analysis of the impact of the change on the incoming freshman class every year since its implementation. This research update represents the fourth follow-up analysis.

In general, trends that emerged following the initial implementation of change have continued each year. Following a drop in the number of freshman applications for Fall Term 2004, the number has increased each year. The overall admission rate also dropped in Fall Term 2004, and has stayed flat or decreased since then, a trend also seen specifically in the admission rate for Black or African American students. The admission rate for Hispanic students has been more variable, while the rate Asian/Pacific Islander students has decreased consistently.

While for all racial or ethnic groups, there was an increase in the proportion of students admitted under special admission conditions immediately following the GPA increase, it has remained flat over the last three years. This research update examines the special admission rate for each ethnic group in more depth below.

Application and Admission Rates

As shown in Figure 1, the overall number of new freshmen applying to PSU declined in Fall Term 2004, but has increased in subsequent years. For Fall Term 2008, there were more applications than in any of the previous five years. Applications decreased by 8% in Fall 2004. In contrast, applications rose by 9% between Fall 2004 and Fall 2006 and 33% between Fall 2006 and Fall 2008.

After the new GPA requirement took effect, a somewhat smaller proportion of applicants were admitted to PSU, compared to previous years. Over the past five years, the proportion of applicants admitted decreased from 84% in Fall Term 2003 to 67% in Fall Term 2008. This effect was felt most strongly among minority applicants.

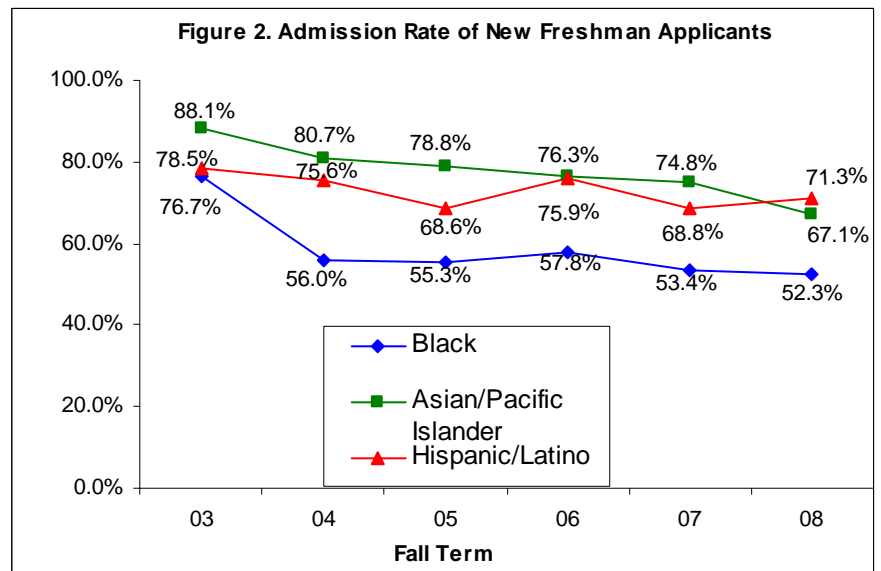
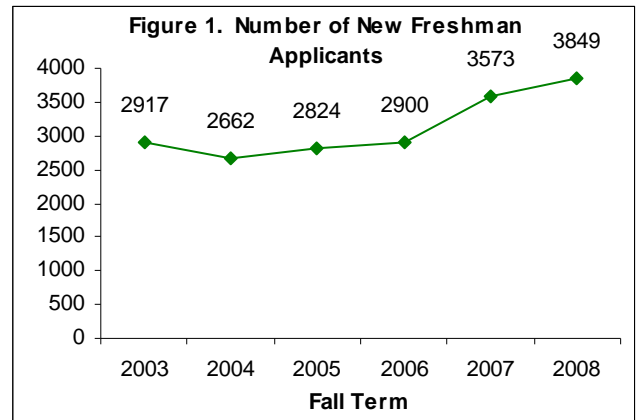
As shown in Figure 2, the admission rate for Black applicants dropped after the new GPA requirements went into effect, from 76.7% for Fall Term 2003 to 56.0% for Fall Term 2004. Since then, the admission rate has fluctuated around the new, lower level. The admission rate for Asian/Pacific Islander students has decreased each year since Fall 2003, when the admission rate was 88.1%, to a Fall Term 2008 admission rate of 67.1%.

The admission rate for Hispanic/Latino students has shown more variability from year to year. Between Fall Term 2003 and Fall Term 2005, it decreased from 78.5% to 68.6%, rose again between Fall Terms 2005 and 2006, dipped back to 68.8% for 2007, and increased to 71.3% for 2008.

Students who do not meet the new GPA requirement continue to have the option to gain admission with a SAT score of 1000, or with a combination of a minimum GPA and minimum SAT scores, according to a matrix developed by the Office of Admissions (see http://www.pdx.edu/admissions/freshman_reqs.html for more detail). There are two categories of special admission.

Students who are missing high school subject area requirements may be admitted under the condition that they complete the missing coursework.

Students who do not meet GPA or SAT admission requirements may petition for special admission to PSU. This feature of PSU's admission policy has been emphasized as a way of offsetting the potentially negative effects the new GPA requirement might have for differentially excluding underrepresented students. Following the change in the entering GPA requirement, the overall racial/ethnic make up of the incoming freshman class did not change substantially, indicating that the special admission option has had the predicted impact.



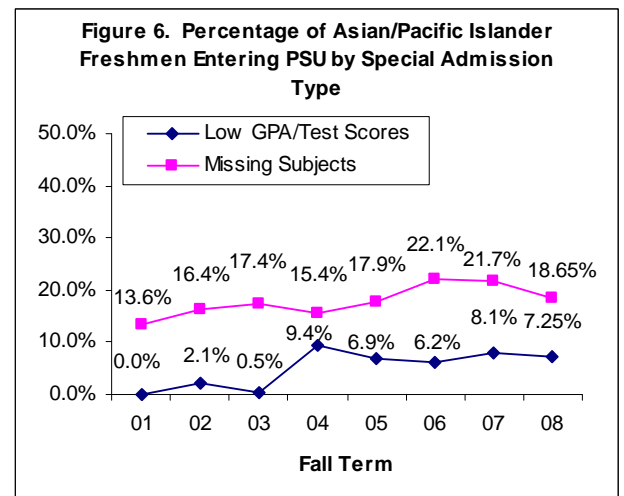
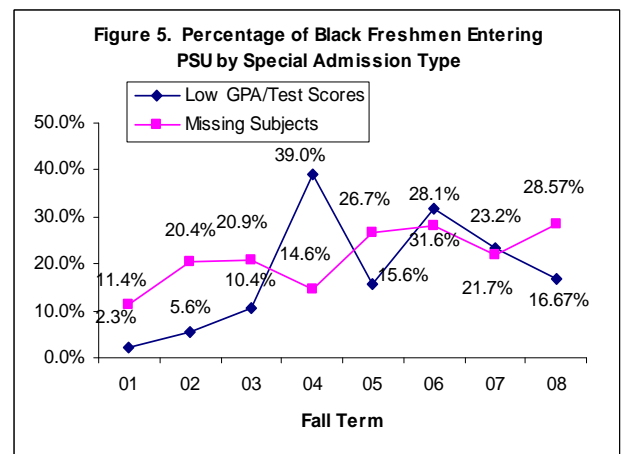
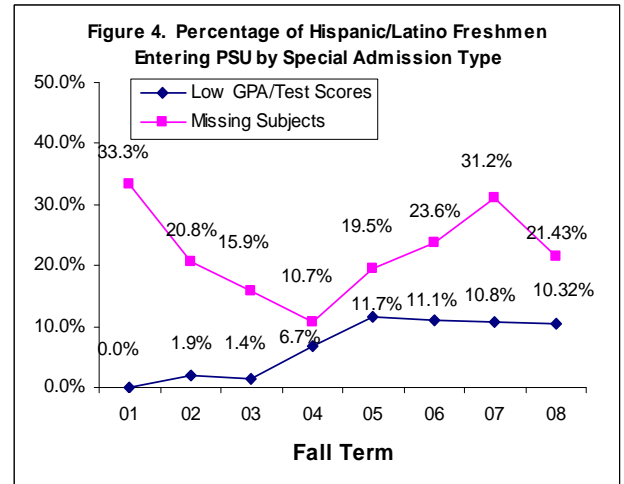
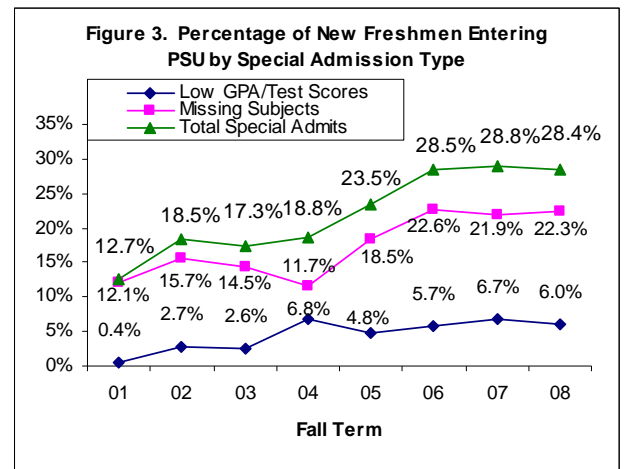
Percentage of New Students Entering with Special Admission

Overall, the percentage of new freshmen entering PSU under either of the special admission categories increased steadily between Fall Term 2003 (17.3%) and Fall Term 2006 (28.5%). (Figure 3.) Since then, the special admission rate has remained stable around 28%. A similar pattern is seen specifically for students entering under the Missing Subjects category. That group increased as a proportion of all admitted freshmen between Fall Term 2003 and Fall Term 2006 and has remained stable since then. Although, students admitted with low GPA or SAT scores make up a much smaller proportion of each new freshman class than those with missing subjects, the proportion has increased, from 2.6% in Fall Term 2003 to 6.8% in Fall Term 2004. This proportion has fluctuated slightly, but has remained around 6% for the last three years.

The overall percentage of Hispanic/Latino students who entered PSU with special admissions increased from 17% in Fall Term 2003 to 41% in Fall Term 2007, but dipped to 31% in Fall Term 2008. As shown in Figure 4, the percentage of Hispanic/Latino freshmen entering with low GPA or test scores increased between Fall Term 2003 and Fall Term 2005, and has fluctuated around 11% since then. The percentage of Hispanic/Latino freshmen entering PSU with missing subject requirements increased steadily between Fall Term 2003 and Fall Term 2007, but dropped in Fall Term 2008.

Approximately one-half of new African American or Black freshmen have entered PSU with special admissions each fall since the GPA requirement change, compared to approximately one-quarter to one-third in the years before the policy change. As shown in Figure 5, the percentage of new Black freshmen entering with low GPA or test scores showed a sharp increase after the new GPA requirement, and has fluctuated widely since then. The percentage of new Black freshmen entering with missing subject requirements decreased between Fall Term 2003 and Fall Term 2004, but has increased since then, fluctuating between 21% and 29%.

Before the new GPA requirement, 18% of new Asian/Pacific Islander freshmen entered PSU with special admissions. Since then, the percentages have ranged from 24% to 30%. As with the other groups examined here, the percentage of new Asian freshmen entering with low GPA or test scores increased between Fall Term 2003 and Fall Term 2004 and has remained at a higher level (between 6% and 9%) since then (Figure 6.) The proportion of Asian freshmen entering PSU with missing subject requirements decreased slightly between Fall Term 2003 and Fall Term 2004, but has risen since. About one-fifth of entering Asian freshmen were admitted with missing subject requirements between Fall Term 2005 and Fall Term 2008.



Overview of Enrolled Student Characteristics

Beyond the overall admission and special admission rate, the research looked at how new GPA requirement affected the characteristics of newly admitted freshmen. Prior to the change in admission requirements, average entering high school GPA for this group varied between 3.15 in Fall Term 2002 to 3.16 in Fall Term 2003. In mirroring increased GPA requirement, the average entering high school GPA for new freshmen rose to 3.23 in Fall Term 2004 and has continued at that level in subsequent years. The average entering high school GPA for Fall Term 2008 was 3.25. Average composite SAT scores also increased over the same time period, from 1022 in 2002, to 1040 in 2008.

A little more than half of the entering freshmen during Fall Term 2008 were women (54%). This proportion has fluctuated only slightly in the last 5 years, ranging from 52% to 54%. One-fourth of new freshmen represent ethnic minorities (not including international students). Over the past five years, the percentage of ethnic minority freshmen has been fairly consistent and continues to hover around the one quarter mark. The proportion of enrolled freshmen belonging to specific groups has shown more variability over time. The percentages of Asian/Pacific Islander freshmen enrolled decreased between Fall Terms 2003 and 2004, but has increased since then. For Fall 2008, 11.3% of new freshmen were Asian/Pacific Islander, which is just slightly below pre-GPA change levels (13%). The percentage of Hispanic freshmen remained stable at around 5%, increasing to a seven-year high of 7% in Fall Term 2008.

Because the numbers of enrolled Native American and Black/African American students are relatively small, it is difficult to identify trends or changes over time. For Fall Term 2008, there were 18 Native American students and 43 Black students enrolled as new freshmen. The percentage of Native American and Black/African American freshmen appears to fluctuate over the past five years, between 0.9% and 2.1%, and 2.4% and 4.3%, respectively. The percentage of Native Americans peaked in Fall Term 2004 at 2.1%, but has decreased since then. The percentage of Black students decreased between 2003 and 2004, increased steadily to 4.3% by 2007, then dropped to its lowest rate (2.4%) in Fall Term 2008.

Conclusions

The new admission requirement of a 3.00 minimum high school GPA has not had a drastic impact on the composition of the new freshman student body. When viewed in light of six-year trends, the generally small differences between the Fall 2004 and Fall 2008 entering freshman classes appear to be part of overall trends. With few exceptions, they do not appear to be sudden changes due to the effects of the new GPA requirement.

The effect of the new GPA requirement is most evident in the increase in the average entering high school GPA of new freshman, as one might expect. In addition, there is some indication that the higher minimum GPA might have more impact on some minority students than on the general entering class. While the overall ethnic/racial composition of the entering class has not changed substantially since the GPA change, within Hispanic/Latino, Asian, and Black entering freshmen groups, a larger proportion of students has entered through special admission than prior to the GPA change.