Characteristics of Fall Term 2009 First-time Freshmen Admitted under the New GPA Requirement

In Fall Term 2004, the high school GPA requirement for freshman admission to PSU was increased from 2.5 to 3.0. An existing special admissions process continued to be available for students who did not meet the requirements. At the time the change took effect, questions were raised about how it might affect the composition of the entering freshman class, application and admission rates, special admission rates, diversity of the student body, gender, mean admission GPA, mean admission SAT scores, and retention. 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 is the fifth follow-up analysis.

Following the increase in GPA requirements there were three ways in which students could be admitted as regular status: (1) high school GPA of 3.0 or higher; (2) a SAT composite score of 1000 or higher; or (3) 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](http://www.pdx.edu/admissions/freshman_reqs.html)). The second option (SAT composite score of 1000 or higher) is slated to be eliminated for future terms.

In addition to the regular admission described above, students who do not meet the requirements may petition for special admission. Special admission falls under two categories: (1) ‘missing subjects’, which applies to students who are missing high school subject area requirements and may be admitted under the condition that they complete the missing coursework. These students meet GPA or SAT requirements and when their missing coursework is completed, they are admitted with regular status. (2) Low GPA/test scores category (‘A5 admits’) applies to students whose scores do not meet GPA or SAT admission requirements. For ‘A5 admits’ the Oregon University System (OUS) allows each public university “a quota of freshmen totaling no more than five
percent of the institution’s first-time freshmen class for the previous academic year” (http://www.ous.edu/stucoun/prospstu/files/Admission%20Policy%202009-10%20Board%20FINAL.pdf).

Application and Admission Rates

As reflected in Figure 1, immediately following the increase in the freshman GPA requirement, the number of applicants decreased by 9%. As indicated by the trend line in Figure 1, it took a period of three years following the change for the trend to recover. In fall 2009 there were a total of 3,893 applicants, a 46% increase since 2004.

Figure 1 also reflects the number of minority applicants. Although the number of total applicants decreased following the GPA requirement change, the number of minority applicants did not. From 2004 (27%) to 2009 (29%) the ratio of minority applicants to total applicants remained fairly consistent.

As expected, after the new requirements took effect a somewhat smaller proportion of applicants were admitted to PSU, compared to previous years (see Figure 2). The immediate effect was felt most strongly among African-American applicants.

The overall admission rate dropped from 84% in fall 2003 to 79% in 2004 and has remained flat since then, with 80% admitted in fall 2009. During the same time period admission trends for Asian/Pacific Islander applicants closely mirrored this overall trend. Following an admission rate of 77% in 2003, the admission rate for African-American applicants dropped to 56% in 2004. This 21% drop was the most drastic among all minority groups. The admission rate for African-American applicants continued to remain below 60% through 2008; however in 2009 the rate increased 7.5 percentage points to 66%, the highest rate since 2004. The admission rate for Hispanic/Latino applicants has varied, but stayed relatively consistent between 2007 (75 %) and 2009 (74 %).

Total special admits increased after the change in admission requirements (see Figure 3). The percentage of total admits admitted as special admits increased from 14 to 15% from 2003 to 2004 then increased substantially by an additional 5.5% per year for the next two years topping out at 25.6% for fall 2006. Since 2006 the proportion of special admits has reflected a downward trend to 10% for fall 2009. As seen in Figure 3 the majority of special admit growth has been due to an increase in the number of ‘missing subjects’ admits.

Figure 1. Number of New Freshman Applicants

Figure 2. Admission Rate of New Freshman Applicants

1 Fall application and admission data includes summer term
Figure 4 reflects the percentage of applicants who were admitted as ‘A5 admits’ subject to the five percent OUS rule explained earlier. In 2003, only 34 applicants were admitted in this category, well below the 5 percent rule at 2%. In 2004, the percentage increased to 7%, with 104 applicants admitted as ‘A5 admits’. The rate reached a high of 8% (123) in 2007; however, 2009 represents a significant decrease, with only 83 applicants (5%) admitted with an ‘A5 admit’ status.

Enrollment
From fall 1999 to fall 2003, the 1st-time freshman class increased by an average of 9% each year (see Figure 5). With the change in admissions requirements, the cumulative effect of decreased applications and lower admissions rates in fall 2004 led to a 9% decrease in the 1st-time freshman class, from 1,536 in 2003 to 1,402 in 2004. By 2007 the 1st-time freshman class topped the 2003 number at 1,612, coinciding with an increase of total applicants during that same year.

Percentage of Newly Enrolled with Special Admission Status
Special admission has been regarded as a way of offsetting the potentially negative effects the new GPA requirement on underrepresented students. It is hard to tell whether or not special admission trends in the missing subject category have been affected indirectly by the increased GPA requirements because the policy on missing subjects has not changed over time.

As reflected in Figure 6, the overall percentage of new freshmen entering PSU under either of the special admission categories increased 2% between Fall Term 2003 (17%) and Fall Term 2004 (19%). The special admission rate continued to increase through 2006 when it reached a plateau at 28%, and it remained stable from 2006 to 2008 before decreasing to 26% in 2009.

Students Entering PSU under the ‘A5 admit’ status by Minority Ethnic Group
In fall 2003, prior to the implementation of the new GPA requirements, 2.6% of students enrolled at PSU as ‘A5 admits’ (see Figure 7). Following implementation, this category reached an all time high in 2004 of 6.8%. This proportion has continued to fluctuate slightly, but was at a four-year low of 5.3% in 2009.

Figure 8 shows the percentage of new freshmen entering PSU as ‘A5 admits’ by ethnicity. Following the implementation of the increased GPA requirement, the percentage of ‘A5 admits’ increased among all ethnic groups. The most drastic increase occurred among African-American students. In 2003, 10% of African-American students entered as ‘A5 admits’; in 2004, this increased to 39%. It decreased again sharply to 15.6% in 2005, but then increased to 31.6% in 2006. Since then, it has declined steadily, reaching 15.5% in 2009.

The percentage of Hispanic/Latino freshmen who entered as ‘A5 admits’ jumped from 1.4% in 2003 to 6.7% in 2004. After reaching a high of 11.7% in 2005, the percentage decreased slightly each year to 10.3% in 2008, before dropping to 3.8% in 2009.

As with the other groups, the percentage of new Asian/Pacific Islander freshmen entering as ‘A5 admits’ increased between Fall Term 2003 (0.5%) and Fall Term 2004 (9.4%) and has remained at a higher level (between 6% and 9%) since 2004. Like other groups, 2009 reflects the lowest percentage (5.69%) since 2004.

Students Entering PSU with Missing Subjects by Ethnicity

As noted earlier, the policy regarding admission with missing subjects did not change in 2004 when the GPA requirements increased. Trends for the percentage of total new freshmen entering as missing subject admits by ethnicity tend to mirror the overall trends for all missing subject admits. As reflected in Figure 6, the percentage of total ethnic minority students who were missing subject admits decreased in 2004, then increased from a low of 16% in 2004 to a high of 24% in 2009, a pattern similar to that for the total group of new freshmen.

Overview of Enrolled Student Characteristics
Beyond its examination of the overall admission and special admission rates, this study looked at the effect of the new GPA requirements on the characteristics of newly enrolled freshmen. For three years prior to 2004, the average entering high school GPA was 3.16 (see Figure 9). As expected, the average entering high school GPA increased following the change in admissions requirements. In Fall Term 2004, the average high school GPA rose to 3.23 and continued at that level in subsequent years. The average entering high school GPA for fall 2009 was 3.25. Also reflected in Figure 9 are average SAT scores which increased for the same time period from 1032 in 2003 to 1044 in 2004. Since SAT score requirements did not increase in 2003, trends in SAT scores may not be directly related to the increase in GPA requirements that followed Fall Term 2003.

Slightly more than half of entering freshmen during Fall Term 2009 were women (51%). This proportion has fluctuated only slightly in the last nine years, ranging from 51% to 54%. The increase in GPA requirements does not appear to have affected the distribution of students by gender.

Figure 10 represents the percentage of ethnic minority Oregon high school students that completed high school between 2002 and 2008 as reported on the Oregon Department of Education website (www.ode.state.or.us). Statistical data prior to 2002 and after 2008 were not available. Figure 10 also reflects the percentage of ethnic minority new freshmen that entered PSU between 2002 and 2008. Trends clearly indicate that the proportion of ethnic minority students completing high school in Oregon has increased at a steady pace during this period, from 15% in 2002 to 24% in 2008.

Alternatively, new freshmen enrollment at PSU by ethnicity (not including international students) over the same period has remained fairly consistent. Prior to the implementation of new GPA requirements, 25% of new freshmen represented ethnic minorities. Following the increase in the GPA requirement that percentage dropped to a low of 23%. There has been little variance since that time. In fall 2009, 26% of entering freshmen represent ethnic minorities.

The enrollment rate for specific groups has shown more variability over time. The percentage of Asian/Pacific Islander freshmen decreased between fall term 2003 (14%) and 2004 (11%), but has increased since that time. For fall 2009, 13% of new freshmen were Asian/Pacific Islanders. The percentage of Hispanic/Latino freshmen remained stable at around 5%, increased to a seven-year high of 7% in fall 2008, and returned to 6% in fall 2009. Because the numbers of enrolled Native American and African-American students are relatively small, it is difficult to identify trends or changes over time. For Fall Term 2008, 23 Native American students and 58 African-American students enrolled as new freshmen. The percentage of Native American and African-American entering freshmen continues to fluctuate, with the percentage of Native Americans peaking in Fall Term 2004 at 2.1% and reaching a
low of 0.9% in 2007. For 2009 the rate of all entering Native American students was 1.4%. The percentage of African-American students decreased between 2003 (4.4%) and 2004 (2.9%), increased steadily to 4.3% by 2007, dropped to its lowest rate (2.4%) in Fall Term 2008, then increased to 3.5% in Fall 2009.

Historically, PSU has been successful in attracting minority students. In the past, the ratio of ethnic minority new freshmen to white freshmen at PSU has exceeded the ratio of minority to white Oregon high school completers; however, more recent trends indicate that by 2010 PSU is at risk of falling behind when compared to the percentage of ethnic minority students completing high school in Oregon. The proportion of ethnic minority students in Oregon continues to increase each year while the proportion of new freshmen at PSU has remained relatively flat (mean of 25% since 2004).

**Retention**

The retention rate of first-time, full-time freshmen at PSU averaged 65% from 2001-2003 (see Figure 11). Looking back even further, the mean retention between 1997 and 1999 was 63% for first-time, full-time freshmen at PSU (2000 was an exceptional year with 69% retention). Following the increase in the GPA requirement the average retention rate for first-time, full-time freshmen increased to an average of 68% (2004-2008). Consistent with first-time, full-time freshmen, the trend of retention for overall students (part-time and full-time combined) has also increased by an average of 3 percentage points during this same time period.

Retention of students who entered PSU as missing subject admits has remained relatively stable from 2001 to 2009, varying from 56% to 61% with no clear pattern. Students who entered as ‘A5 admits’ have shown the most variance in retention, ranging from 40% to 62%. This group also makes up the smallest number of students, ranging from a low of five in 2001 to a high of 106 in 2007. The average retention rate for ‘A5 admits’ since fall 2004 through fall 2008 is 56%, which is nine percentage points lower than the overall average during the same time period.

**Summary**

In general, results of the new admission requirement of a 3.00 minimum high school GPA with the fall term 2004 entering class indicates that PSU is more selective in admitting new freshmen to the university. Although the number of new freshmen applicants to PSU decreased in the three years following the change, the trend of a growing number of applicants each year has resumed. In the three years prior to the change (2001-2003) an average of 84% of new freshmen applicants were admitted. More recently (2007-2009) an average of 72% of new freshmen applicants were admitted. Among ethnic minority applicants, the drop in the rate of admission has affected African-American applicants the most. Prior to the GPA increase (2001-2003) an average of 73% of new freshman African-American applicants were admitted to PSU compared to 56% more recently (2007-2009). On average, however, PSU continues to admit African-American applicants at a rate (3.5% average from 2006-2008) that is higher than Oregon high school completers (2.7% average from 2006-2008).

Given the lower number of applicants and the lower admissions rates the 1st-time freshman class decreased by 9% from fall 2003 to 2004. The rate at which new freshmen entered PSU as ‘A5 admits’ increased following the increase in the GPA requirement. The increase in ‘A5 admits’ is most noticeable
among African-American students: in the three years prior to 2004, an average of 6.7% of African-American students entered as ‘A5 admits,’ compared to 23% since 2004. With the change in admissions requirements, PSU has maximized the 5% OUS special admission rule in an effort to ensure that qualified students who do meet regular admission requirements are given consideration.

The overall entering high school GPA got new freshmen increased from a three year average of 3.16 prior to 2004 to an average of 3.25 between 2007 and 2009.

Historically PSU has recruited and admitted ethnic minority students at a rate that exceeded that of Oregon high school completers. Current trends indicate that the proportion of minority students admitted is approaching that of Oregon high school completers, rather than exceeding it. This suggests that Portland State continue its recruitment and admissions work in this area.

Most significant, following the increase in GPA requirements the average retention rate of first-time freshmen, both part-time and full-time combined has increased by 3% from 65% to 68%.

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