

Senate Roundtable Summary Spring 2001

The second Senate Roundtable was held Saturday, 3 March on the topic of standards. That topic was discussed as three primary questions: What are appropriate admission standards for MSU? How do we deal with students who are admitted with low scores? Should (and how should) we attempt to enforce higher standards of grading? A summary of the discussion appears below:

Admission standards :

There was strong sentiment that admission standards ought to be raised **B** both to raise the quality of our programs and to be honest with students about their chances of success. There was general agreement that a commitment to entering students cannot be made unless it is founded in an initial assessment of their ability to succeed. In the historical context, the goal of the **A**People's University[®] ought to be to make education financially accessible to all, not necessarily to have open admissions.

On the other hand, there was strong sentiment that standards ought not to be raised in such a way as to severely impact MSU's minority enrollment.

There is a considerable body of data, generated both here and across the country, suggesting that high school GPAs are better predictors of college performance than ACT scores: the latter show what a student has learned, but the former show how hard someone has worked relative to others, even if only in a poor environment.

There was a consensus that raising admission standards to an ACT of 20 (up from 16) *or* a high school GPA of 2.5 (up from 2.0) is a reasonable goal and would not excessively impact minority enrollment.

The role of the entire educational system within Mississippi was discussed. High school counselors need to be updated about performance expectations. Given the number of transfer students from community colleges, a stronger and continuous dialogue with community colleges must be undertaken concerning expectations and standards for admission. All community colleges need to be operating at the same level.

Another discussion focussed on placement of entering students in the proper classes through a testing regime. Many departments already conduct intensive and effective placement testing. More well designed placement testing may help to uphold classroom standards.

During orientation, more emphasis might be placed upon introducing students to the intellectual environment of the university. It was agreed that connection of students with individual faculty as early as possible as well as appropriate recognition/rewards for excellence in advising are necessary.

Supervision of marginally qualified students:

The recently adopted Enrollment Management Policy, which prevents students with low scores from declaring majors and requires them to be advised by the Academic Advising Center, has not been in force long enough to show success, but there was general agreement with the idea of such supervision of marginal students. There was not much sentiment for increased restrictions on housing, fraternity

membership, or athletic participation.

Opinion was divided on whether the extension of such restrictions to all freshmen (in a kind of **A**General College@, was a good idea. Some thought that delaying choice of majors was a good idea, while others argued that early involvement with a department increased retention.

Grading standards :

There is abundant evidence that grades run substantially higher in some colleges than in others, not necessarily in proportion to the average ACT scores in those colleges. Some inflation appears to be attributed to unusual grading practices for seniors enrolled in practicum courses where A's are being assigned for satisfactory completion of these required **A**internships@. It was generally agreed that a satisfactory-unsatisfactory measure of performance is a better approach.

Some expressed doubt that the problem of grade inflation was worse at MSU than elsewhere, even at Harvard or Yale. Most said the problem was excessive and needed to be addressed.

The Psychology Department is already looking collectively at grade data, by course and professor. There was a consensus that simple discussion of the basis for differences, i.e. quality of students, grading philosophy, etc., is a legitimate and potentially effective way of maintaining departmental norms. This approach was discussed as part of an accountability factor relative to teaching performance and could be conducted as part of a faculty meeting or as part of the annual review of a faculty member by the Department Head. Such discussions of data must make due allowance of the level of the course and whether the students are majors or non-majors.

For disciplines in which it is appropriate, use of standardized tests may provide a check on grades.