

Rutgers University Senate
Academic Standards, Regulations, and Admissions Committee
Response to Charge S-0605
March 27, 2009

Charge S-0605, Admissions and Financial Aid Assessment. Assess the current strengths and weaknesses of the Admissions and Financial Aid operations at Rutgers. How well do Undergraduate Admissions and Financial Aid serve the needs of the Camden, Newark, and New Brunswick Campuses? Is the current balance between centralization of support services and devolution of authority among the campuses optimal? To what extent should the three regional campuses “go their own way” with regard to undergraduate recruiting? How can we best explain Rutgers as one university with three campuses, each with its own particular character and strengths? Make recommendations for improvement based on your assessment.

In considering this charge, ASRAC met with Camden Interim Chancellor Margaret Marsh, Camden Associate Chancellor for Enrollment Management Deborah Bowles, Newark Director of Admissions Jason Hand, Vice President for Enrollment Management Courtney McAnuff, and Associate Vice President for Enrollment Management Deborah Epting. In addition, several staff, faculty, and administrative members of ASRAC have had substantial experience with undergraduate admissions and, to a lesser extent, financial aid. The Committee devoted all or part of seven meetings to the discussion of the charge, beginning in fall 2007.

ASSESSMENT OF STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

Progress

A great deal of progress in enrollment management has been made at Rutgers over the past dozen years. To quote the report of the 2005 New Brunswick Task Force on Undergraduate Education, during this period, “the undergraduate admissions and recruitment operation has improved dramatically in professionalism, efficiency, responsiveness, and effectiveness. The admissions staff has markedly decreased turnaround time in processing applications, become much more responsive to inquiries from prospective applicants and their families, developed a state-of-the-art admissions web site that allows prospective students to apply on line and easily track the status of their applications, produced an impressive array of high-quality recruitment materials, and greatly improved relations with high school guidance counselors.”¹ During this period, the number of applications received, the number of students enrolling, and the admissions profiles of the entering students have steadily increased. The 2008 entering class is the largest, the strongest academically, and the most diverse Rutgers class ever.

Comparable progress has been made in Financial Aid over the past decade, particularly with respect to increased efficiency and responsiveness, due in large part to increasingly effective use of technology. Substantial progress has also been made in integrating the activities of Admissions, Financial Aid, the Registrar, Student Accounts, Housing, and Scheduling in order to provide a variety of user-friendly online services for applicants, admitted students, and enrolled students.

A major step forward in improving enrollment management at Rutgers was the creation in 2006 of the position of Vice President for Enrollment Management, reporting directly to the Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs, and the hiring, in 2007, of Courtney McAnuff as the first

¹ *Transforming Undergraduate Education*, report of the New Brunswick Task Force on Undergraduate Education, 2005, p. 101.

occupant of that position. According to the Rutgers self-study document prepared for the 2008 Middle States Reaccreditation Evaluation, the Vice President for Enrollment Management is charged with doing the following:²

- enhancing the recruitment, enrollment, and retention of a highly diverse and competitive student body;
- developing a clear, cohesive undergraduate enrollment management plan for the university's multiple campuses;
- communicating more effectively the advantages of Rutgers as a major research university, as well as the particular character and strengths of the New Brunswick/Piscataway, Newark, and Camden campuses, to prospective students, their families, and the general public;
- working closely with the University Foundation to increase external funding for student financial aid, both need-based and merit, as well as developing strategies for using existing merit aid more effectively to assist in recruiting and retaining students;
- further integrating the activities of the Offices of University Undergraduate Admissions, Financial Aid, and the Registrar to meet the needs of prospective and currently enrolled students more effectively

Vice President McAnuff has already undertaken major initiatives to make more effective use of university merit funds in recruiting high-achieving students, to increase access to Rutgers by economically disadvantaged students from Rutgers' home cities, to increase internal and external funding for student aid, both need-based and merit, and to increase admissions yield.

The progress of the last years has been accompanied by a very substantial devolution of authority and responsibility for both admissions and financial aid from the central administration to the Chancellor's Offices in Newark and Camden. The current state of devolution in these areas is spelled out in the following excerpt from the Middle States self-study document³:

The vice president for enrollment management directs the Office of University Undergraduate Admissions, the Office of Financial Aid, and the Office of the University Registrar. In addition, general policy and procedures for all three campuses are coordinated by the vice president. The Camden and Newark offices of admissions, financial aid, and registrar report directly to their respective provosts. They do, however, utilize systems and services centralized in New Brunswick.

University Undergraduate Admissions

The Office of University Undergraduate Admissions currently functions as a centralized unit to recruit prospective applicants, process and review applications, render decisions, award university merit scholarships, yield admitted students, and satisfy the new student enrollment goals for the schools on the New Brunswick Campus.

In July 2003, as part of devolution, operating budgets and line personnel for the Camden and Newark admissions offices were shifted to the campus provosts. Their admissions offices then assumed responsibility for establishing and satisfying campus enrollment goals, developing admissions guidelines, managing application review, campus-based scholarship programs, on and off-campus recruitment events, open houses, yield activities, and developing campus publications, communications, and enrollment services.

The Camden associate provost for enrollment management and the Newark admissions director work closely with colleagues in Office of University Undergraduate Admissions in the areas of

² *Educational Change at Rutgers: An Institutional Self-Study*, Section I: Undergraduate Enrollment Management and Educational Progress, p. 1.

³ *Educational Change at Rutgers: An Institutional Self-Study*, Section IX: Intercampus Governance and Devolution, pp. 16-17. Note that since this was written, the Newark and Camden Provosts have become Chancellors.

strategic planning, program coordination and enrollment management. Admissions counselors in all three campus offices continue to review first-year and transfer applications for all college choices. Counselors in the Camden and Newark admissions offices prioritize the review of first choice and single choice applicants to their regions.

Each campus develops a strategic marketing plan based on geodemographic and enrollment data. “High-yield” areas are identified for each campus so that regional market penetration is maintained. In addition, a universitywide database of prospective students is available and the admissions offices have the ability to segment or augment this pool for their communication needs. Recruitment territories are assigned to counselors based on several factors including campus interests and program priorities. Counselors in the Office of University Undergraduate Admissions are responsible for marketing and promoting the entire university as well as the New Brunswick Campus. Recruiters in all three offices represent the entire university, regardless of their campus affiliation. This allows us to maximize outreach and minimize duplication of efforts within recruitment territories.

Office of Financial Aid

In 2003, the Office of Financial Aid was restructured. As a result of that initiative, the campus director at Newark reports directly to the Newark vice provost and the campus director at Camden reports directly to the Camden associate provost for enrollment management. Presently, there is a “dotted line” relationship between the campus directors and the university director in order to ensure consistency in student aid delivery standards.

The university director of financial aid, located in New Brunswick, oversees all matters of technical operations; federal, state, and institutional compliance; student employment; and funds management for all three regions. All interactions with federal and state entities are conducted through the university director. Client service activities are the responsibility of the individual campus directors at all three regions. NCAA compliance and reporting is handled by the campus directors with technical support from the New Brunswick office.

The reporting and service relationships between New Brunswick and the campuses are the same, and local responsibilities are also the same. The role of the offices in enrollment management decisions specific to the campuses is handled at the campus level, as is the interaction of the campus financial aid offices with other campus administrative offices. All matters concerning personnel take place at the campus level.

Challenges

Despite the progress of recent years, enrollment management at Rutgers faces a number of serious challenges which must be addressed in order to achieve the goal of serving the needs of all three geographic campuses in an equitable and effective manner. These challenges are spelled out below and some recommendations for addressing them are given in the final section of this report.

Lack of an Integrated Student Data Management System

By far the most serious, indeed critical, problem facing enrollment management and other student services at Rutgers is the lack of a comprehensive, integrated student database management system. Admissions and Financial Aid, as well as the Registrar, Scheduling, Housing, etc. all have separate mainframe-based data management systems, most of which date from the 1980s. These systems are outmoded, extremely time-consuming to maintain, and - most importantly - cannot communicate with one another. A limited degree of integration among the disparate legacy systems has been cobbled together via coordinated batch updates of all the systems, but serious gaps exist, real-time updates are not possible, and the procedures required consume large amounts of staff time that could be put to much better use. The increased pressure on these legacy systems caused by increases in the number of applicants, in enrollment, and in demand for financial aid has brought the situation to crisis level. Since the financial aid data management system does not communicate with other

Rutgers financial systems and therefore does not automatically capture student aid awarded directly by schools and colleges (via RIAS, for example), it has become increasingly difficult and time-consuming to ensure compliance with federal regulations against over-awarding of aid and IRS reporting requirements. Other serious potential problems are caused by the lack of direct communication between the Registrar's and Housing databases.

Lack of Sufficient Staff and Financial Resources

Admissions and Financial Aid, like all service units at Rutgers, have been hit hard by recent cuts in staff levels and operational budgets. These cuts have come at a time of increasing statewide interest in Rutgers, increasing numbers of applications, increasing enrollments, and increasing demand for financial aid. The resulting strain on staff and financial resources, greatly exacerbated by the need to deal with our antiquated legacy software systems, is jeopardizing our ability to sustain recent progress and continue to move forward in both Admissions and Financial Aid.

Structural Challenges

There are, we believe, some challenges inherent in the current largely devolved administrative structure of undergraduate admissions in which (1) the University Office of Undergraduate Admissions also serves as the New Brunswick Admissions Office and (2) the Admissions Staff in Newark and Camden have no reporting relationship – not even a dotted-line one – to the Vice President for Enrollment Management.

As already noted, the University Office of Undergraduate Admissions provides a number of important services for all three campuses; i.e., maintenance of the admissions database, the online application, and the admissions web site; initial processing of applications; provision of enrollment projections and statistical analysis; preparation of university-wide marketing materials; training of recruiters from all campuses; and sponsoring university-wide recruitment events. Despite the best of intentions by all concerned, the fact that the University Office of Undergraduate Admissions is coincident with the New Brunswick Admissions Office is seen as problematic, at least by staff from Newark and Camden. Admissions staff members from those campuses believe that the current structure gives New Brunswick undue control over university-wide admissions policies and procedures and has led to decisions being made without sufficient consideration of their effects on Newark and Camden. For example, it is alleged that:

- recruiters trained by University Admissions are not sufficiently knowledgeable about the specific strengths of the Newark and Camden campuses.
- changes in university-wide recruiting materials or common admissions procedures and policies are sometimes made without adequate consultation with colleagues in Newark and Camden.

The current structure is also not optimal for the New Brunswick campus. The staff of University Undergraduate Admissions finds it increasingly difficult to deal with its dual charge to provide centralized services to all three campuses and serve as the New Brunswick Admissions Office, given increasingly inadequate resources. Staff members fear, moreover, that all funds budgeting will make the situation worse.

The other problematic aspect of the current admissions structure is the fact that the Vice President for Enrollment Management has no authority over admissions personnel in Newark or Camden. This, in turn, makes it very difficult for Vice President McAnuff to fulfill his charges to (1) develop a clear, cohesive undergraduate enrollment management plan for the whole university and (2) communicate more effectively the advantages of Rutgers as one major research university with three campuses, each with a particular character and strengths. To cite just one illustration of the problem: there is, in practice, no effective mechanism for coordinating university-wide and local campus and school marketing initiatives. As a result, prospective students are being bombarded with uncoordinated and sometimes competitive messages from the three geographic campuses. University Undergraduate Admissions has recently received a number of complaints from parents that their children are being inundated with messages from parts of Rutgers in which they have no interest. The Admissions staff fears that this is “turning off” a number of prospective students and leading them to ignore all messages from Rutgers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: We recommend that the University acquire a comprehensive integrated student database management system as a matter of highest priority.

This is by far our strongest recommendation, which we believe to be critically important. We understand that commercial integrated student database management systems that would serve our needs cost tens of millions of dollars. Despite the high cost and our difficult budgetary situation, we believe that a way needs to be found to acquire an integrated system now because the problems caused by our antiquated legacy systems are creating a crisis situation. Developing our own integrated data management system in-house might substantially lower the up-front costs, but we doubt that Rutgers has the staff resources to do this in a reasonable time frame and note that the large majority of our sister AAU publics have purchased commercial data management software packages. In any case, we emphasize that time is of the essence due to the increasingly severe difficulties inherent in the current situation.

Recommendation 2: We recommend that the Office of University Undergraduate Admissions be separated from the New Brunswick Admissions Office so that the former becomes a separate unit, reporting directly to the Vice President for Enrollment Management and providing services to all three campuses, including maintaining the admissions database, the university admissions portal, and the online application; managing information systems and providing data analysis; initial processing of applications; producing university-wide marketing materials; training recruiters; and sponsoring university-wide recruitment events.

Establishing a University Undergraduate Admissions Office separate from the New Brunswick Admissions Office will, we believe, provide Newark and Camden with greater access to the centralized admissions services, more help with data analysis and enrollment planning, and more input into the development of university-wide admissions policies and procedures. At the same time, it will free New Brunswick admissions personnel to concentrate their efforts on the schools on the New Brunswick campus. Finally, it will provide a neutral forum in which admissions staff from all three campuses can share best practices and plan for the future in a noncompetitive manner.

Establishing separate University and New Brunswick Admissions offices will, we believe, require only modest additional resources. In one possible scenario, those staff members who currently provide centralized admissions services, including the Assistant Vice President for Enrollment Management (formerly Director of Information Services), the Director of Application Services, and the webmaster, would become part of the new University Admissions Office and would report directly to the Vice President for Enrollment Management⁴; other personnel currently in the Office of University Undergraduate Admissions would become the staff of the New Brunswick Admissions Office. If this scenario were adopted, the University Admissions Office would, we believe, also need a manager or coordinator to oversee its day to day operations and probably additional, possibly part-time, staff support to help with training of recruiters and university-wide recruiting communications. It would be highly desirable, for the sake of clarity, to have the University and New Brunswick Admissions Offices physically separated from one another.

If it is not possible to separate the two admissions offices completely at the present time due to budgetary constraints, we strongly recommend that the separation be done in stages. The first stage might involve having the Director of Application Services, like the Assistant Vice President for Enrollment Management, report directly to the Vice President for Enrollment Management.

Recommendation 3: We recommend that the authority of the Vice President for Enrollment Management to coordinate admissions policies and communications among all three campuses be strengthened, while still preserving the devolution of authority and responsibility to the campuses for local recruiting, application review, setting admissions guidelines, admissions decisions, yield activities, etc. To accomplish this, we recommend that the Associate Chancellor for Enrollment Management in Camden and the Admissions Director in Newark have a dotted line reporting relationship to the Vice President for Enrollment Management.

Strengthening the Vice President for Enrollment Management's authority to coordinate marketing communications, as well as admissions policies and procedures, will insure that all Rutgers undergraduate marketing messages portray Rutgers as one major research university with three geographic campuses in a consistent and coherent fashion and that prospective students and their families are introduced to Rutgers and its campuses and schools in a coordinated and effective manner. Having a dotted line reporting relationship between the Associate Chancellor for Enrollment Management in Camden and the Admissions Director in Newark to the Vice President for Enrollment Management will also facilitate the Vice President's efforts to develop a comprehensive university-wide undergraduate enrollment management plan that will serve the needs of all three geographic campuses. Finally, this change will bring Admissions more in line with Financial Aid, where there is a dotted line relationship between the campus financial aid directors and the University Director of Financial Aid.

Recommendation 4: We recommend that University Undergraduate Admissions make greater use of cutting-edge information technology in order to communicate more effectively with prospective students and their families.

It is widely accepted that this generation of prospective college students seeks and receives nearly all its information about possible college choices from electronic sources: college and university web

⁴ The Assistant Vice President for Enrollment Management, who manages the Research and Enrollment Information Services team supporting admissions, financial aid, and the registrar, already reports directly to the Vice President for Enrollment Management.

sites, internet sites comparing colleges and universities, e-mail and text messaging, podcasts, social networking sites, YouTube, etc. and that students are seeking this information at an earlier age. It is extremely important, therefore, that Rutgers make as effective use as possible of the latest technology in its online recruitment activities. Increased use of technology also provides a way to do more with less; i.e., to deal with increasing enrollment and financial aid pressures with decreasing staff and financial resources.

The Rutgers University Admissions web site has been substantially improved over the past several years. It now has links to student blogs, brief videos by Scarlet Ambassadors, slide-show tours of all three campuses, and a feature allowing prospects to create their own Rutgers information brochures. A number of the newer features, however, highlight the New Brunswick campus only. Moreover, our web site is still less sophisticated than those of a number of our competitors. Rival institutions now have very sophisticated and professional looking narrated video tours of their campuses. A number of web sites also offer pod casts of lectures taught by the institution's best teachers. Other institutions are also making increasing use of social networking sites and of YouTube.

We therefore recommend that the Rutgers Admissions web site be upgraded to make it comparable to those of our competitors. In particular we recommend that we upgrade our virtual tours and look into offering pod casts of lectures by outstanding teachers from each campus. We also need new student videos (most of those featured have graduated) that include students from Newark and Camden.⁵

Finally, we believe it is very important to make maximum use of the new Rutgers Welcome Center to recruit for the whole university. This should include providing virtual tours of the Newark and Camden Campuses, in addition to the five New Brunswick/Piscataway campuses, at the Center. While at the Center, visitors should also be able to make an appointment to visit Newark or Camden in person.

2008-2009 ASRAC

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⁵ We very recently learned that a new admissions web site, designed by an outside marketing firm and containing over an hour of student and faculty video content, will go live in the next few weeks. This clearly represents a step in the right direction.