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December 7, 2006

Rep. Stephen L. Nass
State Assembly
P.O. Box 8953
Madison, WI 53708

Dear Representative Nass:

On behalf of the UW System Board of Regents, I would like to provide an initial response to your December 6 letter requesting that the Board delay action on a proposed new **Freshman Admissions Policy**.

Our goal is to provide a clear, contemporary, and unified set of guidelines for the campus-based admissions processes. In an effort to better serve our prospective students, as well as their parents and school counselors, the proposed policy (attached) would consolidate into a single document the following five policies:

- 72-5 on Nonresident Undergraduate Quotas
- 72-11 on the Freshman Admissions Policy
- 86-5 on the Use of the American College Test
- 87-8 on Traditional and Nontraditional Freshman Admissions Policy
- 97-4 on Competency Based Admissions

As you review the attached draft policy, you'll see that it begins with a detailed list of requirements for admission to any University of Wisconsin System campus, followed by a section on admissions criteria. Because the latter section appears to be the source of your concern, let me reiterate that **academics are the most important consideration for admitting new students to any UW System campus. That has always been true of our UW System institutions, and will remain so under my leadership as President. The best way for any prospective student to gain admission to a UW campus is to work hard in school and demonstrate academic achievement.**

Our campus-based admissions officers rely on a comprehensive review of each applicant to look for evidence that the student will succeed at the institution. Even in such a "whole-student" review, **prior academic performance remains the most important indicator of college success**, but even this area cannot be assessed accurately by looking at one or two numerical scores. For example:

- High school grade-point averages can be affected by the kinds of classes that students take. One student may earn very high grades in lower-level classes, while another earns more modest scores in rigorous math, advanced science, and college-preparatory English.
- Variations in grading methodologies vary from school district to school district, and from classroom to classroom.
- Class rank in high school may be affected by variations in course load among individual students, the number of high-achieving students in each school, and the overall competitive climate within each school.

A comprehensive review process provides additional, relevant, and important information about the applicant's potential for success at the university. Numerical test scores may not tell the whole story. Other indicators include work experience, community service, and personal characteristics.

As we work to attract a larger number of non-traditional adult students to the UW, for example, we may need to place a higher value on their career experiences, military training and professional achievement, versus ACT/SAT scores they may have earned some 20 or 30 years ago.

As you know from personal experience, a “UW” degree has tremendous prestige among employers and voters alike, and we must maintain that strong national and worldwide reputation. To that end, we are listening carefully to the demands of leading American businesses. Increasingly, they want employees who have a first-rate education and a global perspective.

Business leaders are adamant that the university must do a better job of diversifying the student educational experience, our campus environments, and our graduating classes. You’ll recall that some major employers have expressed misgivings about recruiting at our UW campuses because our student population today does not meet their standard. That is unacceptable, and it is something we can change.

Greater diversity on our campuses is a social and economic imperative for the United States in the 21st Century. It is what our “market” demands. In the competitive marketplace where new college graduates seek gainful employment, multi-cultural competence is an important prerequisite. Our colleagues in the corporate world tell us it is increasingly a major factor in determining the competitiveness of American business.

If, after screening applicants for academic achievement, we seek to consider *any* other important factors – including race and ethnicity – we are legally bound to consider *all* factors and personal characteristics. As you will see in the proposed policy, these also include:

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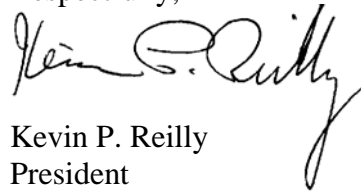
- Student experiences
- Leadership qualities
- Motivation
- Special talents
- Status as a non-traditional or returning adult
- Prior service in the United States armed services
- Socio-economic disadvantage

At our flagship UW-Madison campus, this comprehensive approach has been a major ingredient in that university's national and global success. Let me cite UW-Madison Admissions Director Rob Seltzer, who puts this topic of comprehensive review in the proper perspective:

*"While recognizing there is more to a student than his or her grades, **academics are still the most important consideration** in a holistic review. The bar is not lowered, and in my opinion, the result is that stronger students are selected. Because we've been successfully using the holistic approach all along, we've found it creates a well-rounded student body and ultimately yields a better education, learning environment, and college experience for everyone."¹*

In closing, let me reiterate our intent to respond more fully to the issues, concerns (and a few misperceptions) raised in yesterday's letter. If we have not done a good job of explaining the proposed policy and the compelling academic reasons for implementing these changes, we will certainly take time to do so, regardless of the Board's actions today.

Respectfully,



Kevin P. Reilly
President

PS – I should also express my sincere appreciation for your support of greater need-based financial aid for hard-working Wisconsin families. We look forward to working with you and other legislators who share this commitment to broader educational access.

¹ "Counselor Update", Fall 2006, <http://www.admissions.wisc.edu/hsnews/hsnewsfall06.pdf>

FRESHMAN ADMISSIONS POLICY

The University of Wisconsin System has long recognized that higher education serves as a crucial pathway for advancing individual self-knowledge and knowledge of the world around us, fostering new knowledge and ideas, preparing individuals for future leadership positions, and for promoting the economic success of our students and of our state. The UW System through its freshman admissions policy strives to provide the highest quality educational opportunity for all students in a diverse environment. To achieve this, the UW System's admissions policy provides for an admissions process that allows each institution to admit those students whose academic preparation, background and personal experience suggest that the student will benefit from the educational experience and contribute to the educational environment at that institution.

The following principles establish minimum requirements for freshman admissions. Institutions may establish more specific requirements, consistent with the principles and requirements of this systemwide policy.

I. Admissions Requirements.

Freshman applicants must satisfy the following minimum requirements to be eligible for consideration for admission:

- A. Graduation from a recognized high school or the equivalent.
 - 1. A recognized high school is one which either (a) is accredited by a regional accrediting association or state university or (b) is recognized or accredited by a state department of public instruction or its equivalent.
 - 2. An applicant who has not graduated from a recognized high school must provide evidence of satisfactory completion of the requirements for a high school equivalency certificate or a diploma from a recognized high school, school system, or state department of public instruction based on the GED examination, the Wisconsin High School Equivalency Examination, or other established criteria. Applicants from alternative educational backgrounds, including home-schooled students, should contact the Admissions Office at the campus of interest for admissions information. Additional documents, testing, and a personal interview may be required.
- B. Completion of the UW application form and submission to the institution(s) by the required deadline.
- C. Submission of ACT or SAT scores to the institution.

D. Satisfaction of academic unit requirements. Students must satisfy either (1) or (2).

1. For students graduating from high school in spring, 1995 and thereafter, a minimum of 17 high school units is required. (One unit equals one year of high school study or the equivalent.) Thirteen of the 17 units must be distributed as follows:

English	4 units
Social Science	3 units
Mathematics	3 units
Natural Science	3 units

The remaining four units will be:

From the above areas, foreign language,
fine arts, computer science, and other
academic areas 4 units

TOTAL 17 units

Each institution may specify additional unit requirements for the remaining four units and may specify required content for all 17 units. Students graduating from high school prior to spring, 1995, should consult with the Admissions Office at the UW institution(s) for the appropriate academic unit requirements.

2. In recognition of curricular initiatives occurring in many high schools that depart from a traditional Carnegie unit structure, the UW System Board of Regents has approved an alternative method by which an applicant may demonstrate that he or she has satisfied the academic unit requirement. This is referred to as Competency-Based Admission.

High school officials may elect to prepare a UW System Competency-Based Admission profile in addition to, or in lieu of, the traditional high-school transcript for those students whose high school curriculum is not well described by the traditional Carnegie unit structure. The combination of the student's credentials must indicate evidence of preparation in English, social sciences, mathematics, and natural science at a level comparable to that assumed by the traditional academic unit requirements. The admission requirements at each institution for students who apply using Competency-Based Admission will be equivalent to the admission requirements for students who apply under the Carnegie unit system.

- E. An institution has the discretion to waive one or more of the minimum requirements for particular applicants where appropriate, based on sound educational judgment.

II. Admissions Criteria.

Freshman applicants must demonstrate that they are prepared to do satisfactory academic work at the institution to which they are applying, and that their membership as part of the campus community will contribute to the quality and educational environment of the institution. The following criteria will be considered in making the admissions decision:

- A. Academic factors, such as an applicant's college preparatory course work and grade point average and/or class rank.
- B. ACT or SAT scores, although they may not be the sole criteria for admission. An institution may require additional test scores of some or all of the applicants as supplemental information.
- C. Other factors will be considered in the admissions decision. These factors include student experiences, leadership qualities, motivation, special talents, status as a non-traditional or returning adult, veteran, and whether the applicant is socio-economically disadvantaged or in an historically underrepresented racial or ethnic group.

III. Non-resident Enrollment.

Non-resident undergraduate enrollment may not exceed 25% at any UW institution. Each institution may limit the admission of non-resident new freshman to ensure that the total undergraduate non-resident enrollment does not exceed 25%. This limitation does not include Minnesota reciprocity students. Requirements and standards for out-of-state applicants will be the same as those for resident applicants except that an institution may adopt special requirements for international applicants.

IV. Admissions Appeals.

Applicants who are not accepted for admission may appeal for special consideration through a process defined by the institution.