Meeting May 27, 2020 (1:30 PM-2:30 PM)

Curriculum and Instruction Committee, Chair Brad Roth

Academic Senate, President Linda Beale

Enrollment Management Invited Guests: Associate Vice President for Enrollment Management, Dawn Medley; Senior Director of Admissions, Ericka Matthews-Jackson

Student Success Invited Guest: Associate Provost for Student Success, Monica Brockmeyer

Meeting was held via Zoom to discuss the change in admissions policies regarding the use of standardized tests (ACT and SAT) in fall 2020 and fall 2021 for undergraduate admissions at Wayne State University with a possible Board of Governor’s policy change to admissions that could be long-term. (38 participants were on the call for the majority of the meeting)

After a brief introduction of the visiting representatives from Enrollment Management and Admissions, Brad Roth asked AVP Dawn Medley to discuss the issue brought before the Board of Governors (BOG) to discontinue use of the SAT and ACT in undergraduate admissions for fall 2020 and fall 2021 due to the cancelation of test dates March-May because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

AVP Dawn Medley started with a brief description of, “how we got here.” She stated that the ACT and SAT test dates have been canceled this spring because of Covid-19. The dates for administration of these tests in June and July will be revisited by the testing agency in the weeks to come.

Cancellation of the tests has created an urgent need to consider changes to the current fall 2020 admissions and, potentially, to fall 2021 undergraduate admissions.

As relates to fall 2020: the majority of students for fall 2020 have already been admitted, but WSU does receive some undergraduate applications after May 1st. Admissions wanted to be fair to all applicants who apply after May 1, 2020 so the office has proposed waiving the ACT and/or SAT for these students since they may not have access to taking the standardized tests. This would shift the admissions process from a test-informed policy (which requires the test scores) to a test-optional policy (where the test is not required, but may be submitted). This is in keeping with Board of Governors statutes which allow for a “full evaluation” of applications and would give Admissions the ability to circumvent the need for either the ACT or the SAT as part of the application.

The current review and proposal of changes is directly related to the Covid-19 pandemic. Ideally, Admissions would not make such radical changes to the admissions process, but they were required to make urgent changes to the process in order to respond to the pandemic and to requests from the Board of Governors to implement a fair process to students who may not have access to standardized tests this year. Although the ACT and SAT may be reinstated in June and July, Admissions is considering both temporary changes to the admissions policy and more long-term changes that would move undergraduate admissions at WSU from being *test informed* to being *test optional*.

Another urgency for this review of admissions related to standardized testing is the need for updates to the Common Application for fall 2021 admissions. These changes would need to be submitted by mid-July.

The proposed modifications to the admissions policy, which would not require standardized test scores, has implications for the application materials that would be required as part of the new undergraduate application, including adding short essay questions and other measuring criteria which are currently under consideration. WSU Undergraduate Admissions is looking at admissions models used by other institutions as part of their comparative research into what changes would be best suited to our prospective applicant pool. AVP Dawn Medley mentioned DePaul and other schools that were also looking at test-optional admissions as opposed to test-informed admissions. Additionally, the new admissions process would be informed by broad research; AVP Medley mentioned the text *Measuring Noncognitive Variables: Improving Admissions, Success, and Retention for Underrepresented Students* by William Sedlacek <<https://elibrary.wayne.edu/search~S47?/Xnoncognitive+variables&SORT=D/Xnoncognitive+variables&SORT=D&SUBKEY=noncognitive+variables/1%2C4%2C4%2CB/frameset&FF=Xnoncognitive+variables&SORT=D&1%2C1%2C>> as another source informing some of the options under consideration by Undergraduate Admissions. Other institutions referenced by AVP Medley included Madonna University and Brigham Young.

Enrollment Management is working with Institutional Research to do the required data gathering and data analysis to guide any changes made to the application and to the admissions process, including a deep dive into data about specific high schools and the relationship between ACT/SAT scores and student admission, success, retention and graduation rates. This data will help guide any modifications to the admissions process.

AVP Medley stated that she believes WSU will remain test-informed, but that her staff was considering all options including becoming test-optional to present to the Board of Governors. She also stated that at institutions that have moved to a test-optional application process only about 5-10% of students choose not to submit a test score.

Enrollment Management is also working with Institutional Research to determine how high school grade point averages correlate with student success at WSU.

AVP Medley said that units that require a secondary application or that rely on test scores for admission, like the Honors College, for example, will have to work on a case-by-case basis with Admissions in a coordinated way. She stated that deans and directors in these units should work closely with the staff in Admissions to consider changes to how they admit students.

AVP Medley also discussed the staffing requirements and workflow issues essays would create as part of the application process. For instance, having mandatory essays as part of the application at other institutions has meant having 2-3 readers for each application so that essays can be assessed fairly. This would mean an increased workload for Admissions staff and could potentially require hiring of temporary staff.

Another concern brought up by AVP Medley was that students who do well on the ACT and SAT tend to also do well on graduate and professional school tests like the GRE, MCAT, LSAT, etc., so this raises the question of how we would help WSU students prepare for these tests if we move from a test-informed to a test-optional model for undergraduate admissions.

Other concerns raised by standardized testing during the Covid-19 pandemic include access to technology and home environments that would be conducive to successful test taking if tests are offered at home in June and July. AVP Medley gave an example of Advance Placement tests offered in spring 2020. These were conducted at home for students, in lieu of taking them in testing centers or at their schools. As a result, 15-18% of students were unable to upload their exams. She added we would need to consider the restraints some students would have because of their access to technology and at-home resources.

AVP Medley discussed special admissions program application volume and program needs, which will need to be assessed by Admissions and by the specific unit; examples of these programs include Biomedical Engineering, Nursing, Wayne Med-Direct, Honors and APEX.

AVP Medley also confirmed that Enrollment Management will be working with Institutional Research to define specific variables for success that applications should try to include and assess, including some of the non-cognitive variables mentioned in the text above.

At this point in the discussion, AVP Medley asked Senior Associate Provost for Student Success, Monica Brockmeyer, to discuss how the new measurements in the application and admissions process would align with the goals and philosophy for student success at WSU including for admission, retention and graduation.

SAP Brockmeyer mentioned that we would not expect the changes in any admissions policies to turn back the progress made by Student Success to improve retention and graduation rates at WSU, but she reiterated some of the concerns AVP Medley mentioned about the impact of Covid-19 on student success stating that we do not know what the future impact of Covid-19 will be on the short-term and longer-term success of students.

SAP Brockmeyer said her goal in working with Enrollment Management would be to support as many students as possible, that she would not expect Enrollment Management to manage admissions based on success variables, but would intend for her office to support all admitted students, focusing on the important impact success in the first year has on the long-term retention and graduation success rates. The focus for Student Success would be to identify and successfully support students who are admitted as their needs become apparent. The goal would still be to admit a broad range of students with expectation that we can support them in the first year; the data shows that students who are successful in their first year are more likely to be successful in their subsequent years.

Linda Beale, President of the Academic Senate, asked the following: Current admission with standardized tests takes into consideration quantitative and qualitative factors. Removing the tests also requires considerable resources -- budgetary and staffing, for example. Given the current resource considerations that the University is facing, and the strain on our current budget, how do we think WSU will be able to allocate resources to admissions changes?

SAP Monica Brockmeyer responded saying that 1000 of the 3000 students that we currently bring in would benefit from programs like Warrior VIP, which currently can support only 200. If we could increase the number of students supported by Warrior VIP to 1000 students or so, we would get a strong return on investment through increased retention and graduation rates, leading to additional tuition revenue and overall capacity. We have proposals out for close to $1 million of grants to accomplish this, and are also looking at other possible sources. Donors are excited about this program.

AVP Dawn Medley added that increased resources for application and admissions changes would be based on evaluation of work flow needs and requirements and would likely require allocations for increased demands on Admissions staffing, but that the evaluation process was still being conducted so it is hard to say exactly what will be needed.

AVP Medley then discussed the ways in which a suspension of standardized testing could impact scholarships and merit awards. This still needs to be explored and evaluated to fully examine when test scores would be required for specific awards. When they are required, student would have the option of submitting test scores since we would always be a test-optional institution, if not test-informed. She was unsure at this point of how merit awards would “shake out” since we have until December 1st to make changes to the next round of merit awards. The current urgency is related more to the impending applications submitted after May 1, 2020 and also making the required changes to fall 2021 applications by mid-July to early-August.

Sandra Oliver-McNeil (School of Nursing) asked about programs like the C2 Pipeline (<https://c2pipeline.wayne.edu/>) for high school students from high-risk high schools. When we look at our students from lower performing high schools do we know about their success and retention at WSU?

AVP Medley stated that we can get information and data like that by working with Institutional Research, but that high school preparation varies greatly. She added that student preparation varies greatly and these factors would be taken into consideration in the admissions process.

Sandra Oliver-McNeil followed with some anecdotal examples of students who had been admitted in the past who faced some difficulties because they did not have technology experience and adequate preparation and support prior to arriving at WSU.

AVP Medley agreed that students should not be admitted if we do not think they will be successful, and that Admissions was working on evaluative measures to help assess those factors.

Brad Roth, chair of the CIC Committee, asked the following: If tests are optional will there be any trade off or disadvantage to students who do not take the standardized tests?

AVP Dawn Medley said she does see some areas of concern; notably, first-generation students and Pell-eligible students may not realize that it would be to their benefit to take the test in some cases. Examples: for Biomedical Engineering admissions based on test-optional policy may not be realistic; Wayne Med-Direct may keep the requirement for a minimum ACT/SAT test score; Nursing may require a standardized test score.

She added that WSU would want to be careful not to disadvantage any students. There would need to be a strong communication plan to inform students and high schools what is in the best interests of prospective applicants.

AVP Medley reiterated that the BOG wanted her to explore test-optional admissions policy because of the growing call in higher education to move in the direction of full evaluation with standardized tests being optional rather than required.

Brad Roth asked about the time frame for any roll out and changes to admissions.

Ericka Matthews-Jackson, Senior Director of Undergraduate Admissions, said that the BOG is meeting on June 19, 2020; they expect to have some explanations around test-optional admissions vs. test-informed admissions. New applications would need to be up by August 1, 2020 with decisions about admissions starting October 1, 2020. She did reiterate that applications to Honors, Nursing, BME and Wayne Med-Direct would need to make clear that these programs require a test score, unless that changes.

Linda Beale asked if WSU could make these changes given the drastic cut in resources, including state shortfalls and 0% tuition increase; she also asked how staffing increases could be made and how budget resources would be allocated.

AVP Medley agreed with Linda in principle but indicated that we may be required to find a way to fund the new process if the ACT and SAT tests are not offered since we cannot use a test-informed admissions process if the tests are canceled, as in spring 2020.

Linda Beale followed up by stating that she understood we may have to find the resources in the immediate present, in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, but inquired how this model would be maintained if we shift to a test-optional format on a long-term basis.

Brad Roth also asked if the changes could be for one year only.

AVP Medley confirmed that this is the current plan and that one year is as far as the current changes would extend, and that these are changes made as a direct response to the Covid-19 pandemic; further evaluation would need to be done before this policy would be considered for the long term.

Linda Beale asked AVP Medley if the recommendation to the BOG on June 19, 2020 could be that these changes are for the short-term only with the goal of doing more research before additional recommendations are made.

AVP Medley indicated that although she would really like to make long-term recommendations she would not be able to in the time frame she is currently working under—the June 19, 2020 BOG meeting—so the recommendation will be for the immediate, urgent response to the Covid-19 pandemic. She went on to agree that a long-term solution would require more research. She reaffirmed that Senior Director of Undergraduate Admissions Ericka Matthews-Jackson and her staff are evaluating the ramifications of a test-optional policy. She added that there are implications for the LSAT, GRE, MCAT, etc.

Brad Roth commented that standardized tests are used differently by different kinds of institutions. Many institutions use them to allocate limited seats in competitive-admissions programs, whereas WSU’s use of standardized test scores is a different enterprise, focusing on readiness for college. He noted that the use of standardized test (LSAT) scores in law school admissions, by validating the education that we give our undergraduates, aids WSU students in being admitted to competitive graduate and professional programs that would otherwise pass over them.

AVP Medley agreed with Brad Roth’s comment, adding that ACT and SAT scores at WSU were academic levelers; the test scores act as a balance to the great disparities is high school GPAs and grading standards. She also reiterated that the evaluation of standardized testing in the admissions process was a response to a request put forward by the BOG, which has asked her to consider the use of test scores in our admissions policies. AVP Medley also noted that there are inherent issues with the use of the tests like biases for children from higher economic brackets who tend to do better on tests and have the resources to take test prep courses and to hire tutors. There is also a bias against students from lower income brackets because they have a harder time accessing testing materials, content, books and preparatory resources.

Linda Beale asked what the data at WSU shows for any correlations between test scores and retention and graduation rates or if there is any correlation we see between high school GPAs and test scores which impact graduation rate for WSU undergraduates.

SAP Brockmeyer stated that she did not have the data immediately available but that she would see if Institutional Research could get that information for the Academic Senate and if the data can be sorted by high school.

Linda Beale said that data would be useful quantitative information for the Academic Senate to see, and for use in the evaluation of any changes to the admissions policies.

SAP Brockmeyer said that Institutional Research could work on this but she suggested looking primarily at first-year success rate, not at the six-year retention and graduation rates, because the data would reflect students who did not have access to the new Student Success programming such as more recently admitted students to WSU have had.

AVP Medley added that she was working with Institutional Research to get very granular information.

Senate Member Ewa Golebiowska asked if we adopt these changes to admissions on a temporary basis would there be a need for temporary hires to help with the reading of applications and with the admissions process.

AVP Medley said she might need to hire temporary readers, but that she was also looking into re-defining what some admissions counselors might do during the Covid-19 pandemic since they will not be visiting campuses and recruitment fairs. She said these were all ideas in the very preliminary stages and that she could not give a more definitive answer yet because Admissions is still looking into all options.

Senate Member Yang Zhao asked if Alumni might be able to read applications as volunteers.

AVP Medley said that Ericka Matthews-Jackson and her staff of admissions counselors would be working on devising a strategy for the evaluation of applications.

Linda Beale suggested that all of the issues raised today should be tied to departmental recruiting and that perhaps faculty could also be involved in the reading process, when and where available, stressing the need to work closely with departmental staff and faculty in the admissions process.

AVP Medley stated that Enrollment Management would need to figure out more information like volume, volume content, and workflow impact before creating a new staffing model. She mentioned that she would be concerned that faculty are facing significant changes themselves in moving courses online and would need to assess their ability to take on more work at the moment as everyone adjusts to the changes caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Brad Roth asked if AVP Medley could send the PowerPoint presentation she used in today’s meeting along with any additional information she thought would be useful for the Senate to review.

The meeting concluded with Linda Beale stating that the Policy Committee of the Academic Senate would take up the issue and perhaps would make a statement before the BOG meeting on June 19, 2020, if possible.

Brad Roth thanked the guests, the CIC Committee members and the Academic Senate for taking part in the meeting.